



# Brush Up on Oral Health

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## May 2017

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## Did You Know?

- Nearly 50 percent of adults over age 30 have periodontal disease.
- Periodontal disease is the leading reason for tooth loss in adults.
- People who have missing teeth have a harder time finding jobs than those with all their teeth.

## The Importance of Oral Health for Adults



Just as it is for children, a healthy mouth is important for adults' overall health and well-being. When adults have a healthy mouth, they can speak clearly, eat healthy foods, look healthy, and feel good about themselves.

This issue of [\*Brush Up on Oral Health\*](#) talks about the impact of oral health on adults' overall health and well-being and offers tips on what Head Start staff can do to help adults keep their mouths healthy. A recipe for a healthy snack that can be made in the Head Start classroom or at home is also included.

## Oral Health and Overall Health and Well-Being

In addition to tooth decay, many adults have gingivitis or periodontal disease. Both are infections that affect the gums and bones that hold the teeth in the jaw. In most cases, these diseases occur when bacteria are not cleaned from the teeth and gums daily. Signs of gingivitis and periodontal disease may or may not be noticed.

Gingivitis is a common and mild form of periodontal disease. Signs of gingivitis can include red, swollen gums that bleed when brushing or flossing. Pregnant women often have gingivitis from hormone changes that make their gums more sensitive to bacteria. Brushing twice a day and flossing once a day usually reverses gingivitis.

Untreated gingivitis can spread into the bone that holds the teeth in the jaw. Bone loss around the teeth can occur in mild to moderate periodontal disease. Possible signs of mild to moderate periodontal disease include sensitive teeth, purple or receding gums, or teeth that

look long. It is key to have ongoing care by an oral health professional to prevent more bone loss.

People with severe periodontal disease may notice pus in their gums, bad breath, and loose teeth. It is difficult to treat severe periodontal disease. Often these people lose many or all of their teeth.

In addition to saving a person's teeth, treating periodontal disease is important because the infection can affect a person's overall health by:

- Making it harder for people with diabetes to control their blood sugar. Also, people with diabetes are more likely to develop periodontal disease than those without diabetes.
- Increasing risk for developing heart disease and possibly making existing heart disease worse.
- Increasing risk for stroke.

## What Head Start Staff Can Do to Promote a Healthy Mouth

The steps to keep a healthy mouth are simple. They include:

1. **Brush twice a day with fluoride toothpaste.** Brushing in the morning and just before bed removes the bacteria that cause oral diseases. Use a soft bristled toothbrush and focus on the gums. Use a small amount of fluoride toothpaste and do not rinse after brushing so the fluoride has time to soak into and strengthen the teeth. For more information on brushing, see the American Dental Association's (ADA's) handout, [How to Brush](#).
2. **Floss once a day.** Flossing once a day removes the bacteria that cause periodontal disease from the sides of each tooth where a toothbrush cannot reach. Learning to floss can take time and practice. A dental hygienist or dentist can show you the best method and give feedback on how to improve your flossing. For more information on flossing, see ADA's handout, [How to Floss](#).
3. **Drink fluoridated water throughout the day.** Fluoride in drinking water helps prevent tooth decay. Most bottled water does not contain fluoride.
4. **Avoid frequent snacking throughout the day.** Snacking frequently during the day increases adults' risk of developing tooth decay. This is especially true if the snacks include foods and drinks with added sugars. For more information, see the [May 2013](#) issue of *Brush Up on Oral Health*.
5. **Visit the dental office/clinic regularly.** Visiting the dental office/clinic on a regular basis allows the dental team to check for tooth decay and periodontal disease and develop a plan to help prevent or treat oral diseases. They also provide preventive care and oral hygiene education.



## Cook's Corner: Pinto Bean Tacos

Here's a delicious healthy snack that staff and children can make in a Head Start classroom or at home with their families.

### Ingredients

- 1 15-ounce can pinto beans, rinsed
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup of salsa
- 8 taco shells
- 8 lettuce leaves, torn into bite size pieces
- 1 cup low-fat shredded cheese



### Directions

1. Mix the pinto beans and  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of the salsa in a microwave-proof bowl.
2. Microwave the mixed beans and salsa on high for 1 to 2 minutes.
3. Spoon the bean mixture into the taco shells.
4. Top the bean mixture with lettuce and cheddar cheese.
5. Serve with the remaining salsa.

Makes 8 servings

**Safety Tip:** If children are too young to read or follow written directions, they are too young to use a microwave without supervision.

## Contact Us

The National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness welcomes your feedback on this issue, as well as your suggestions for topics for future issues. Please forward your comments to [health@ecetta.info](mailto:health@ecetta.info) or call 866-763-6481.

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*School readiness begins with health!*



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