



# Healthy Kids

LSU AgCenter Nutrition Programs Newsletter

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**Did you know** that tooth decay (dental caries) is the most common chronic disease of childhood?



## Do you have a Healthy Smile?

About 80% of all children have at least one decayed tooth by age 17. Our state received a "C" on its Health America Report card in 2001. February is Children Dental Health Month, so ask yourself these questions: How is your oral hygiene? Do you brush your teeth at least twice each day? Do you floss regularly? Do you eat healthfully?



Dentists have told us for many years that healthy eating habits lead to healthy teeth and gums and reduce tooth decay. Children need strong, healthy teeth to chew food, speak clearly and have a good-looking smile. That helps them stay healthy, perform better in school and improves their self-confidence.

Baby teeth are as important as the permanent teeth, so don't wait until all the baby teeth are gone to start brushing teeth or visit a dentist! Did you know that almost 90% of children don't go to the dentist until age 7? This may be too late! Baby teeth are like permanent teeth, just smaller and with shorter roots. They can have the same diseases as permanent teeth. Permanent teeth appear around 6 years of age. These are the

teeth that we keep (or we should) for the rest of our life. Once a tooth is lost, there is not another one that will replace it. That's why it is very important to take good care of teeth from the day they appear in the mouth.

Many factors contribute to tooth decay, and eating habits is an important one. According to the Dietary Guidelines, you should eat fewer foods high in sugar, especially between meals. Soft drinks may cause tooth decay, because they are high in sugar. Sugar is the perfect food for the bacteria in your mouth. They multiply and attack the enamel (the outer layer of the tooth), producing decay. By the time the decay is noticed, it may be too late to save the tooth.

These tips may help you keep your teeth healthy and strong:




-  Brush teeth at least twice a day, in the morning and in the evening before going to bed. Don't eat or drink after brushing teeth in the evening (water is OK)!
-  Visit the dentist regularly!




# Parents' Corner



Children are not responsible for the foods that are purchased, so it is your responsibility to offer only healthy foods. Education is critical, since children spend a lot of time at school, where there is no parental supervision. Soft drinks are associated with overweight and obesity among children and adolescents. If children understand why it is important to have healthy teeth, they won't run to the vending machine and drink several soft drinks a day, especially between meals.

## Tips for parents:

-  Offer healthy foods to your children and teach them healthy eating habits. They may not like it now, but they will thank you later.
-  Make regular visits to the dentist. Start no later than your child's first birthday.
-  For children 1 to 6 years old, limit the intake of fruit juices to four to six ounces a day. Don't offer juice at bedtime! Never let your child fall asleep with a bottle containing milk, formula, juice or other sweetened liquids.

-  Teach your child how to brush his or her teeth as soon as possible. Use a soft, small toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste.
-  Don't give your children sticky foods, especially sweet ones, between meals. Foods that should be avoided include: Tootsie Rolls, marshmallows, caramel popcorn, Snickers bars, peanut butter, raisins and cookies. These foods stay in the mouth longer and are difficult to wash away by saliva. Encourage your children to eat whole fruits and fresh vegetables. For a healthy snack, offer them a raw fruit, baby carrots or other vegetables, and plenty of water. If they do eat between meals, they should brush their teeth after they eat. It is OK to have sweet foods with meals, because saliva produced at meals will wash away the acids responsible for caries.
-  Make sure your children get the calcium they need each day (3 cups of low-fat milk or milk products).

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To find out more, contact your parish agent.