

# Brush Away Decay



An Oral Health  
Discussion Guide  
for Grades 4-6

Compliments of



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# BRUSH AWAY DECAY

AN ORAL HEALTH DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR GRADES 4-6

## Introduction

Teeth are important because we need teeth to eat, speak and smile. But we can't do any of those things if we don't take care of our teeth. You've probably known the steps to take to keep your teeth healthy since you were little. But let's take a more detailed look at the importance of good dental hygiene. We'll talk about plaque, what it is and how it can harm your teeth; the effect of fluoride on your teeth; and the right way to brush and floss.

## Plaque

### What is it?

- Plaque is a problem that everyone needs to worry about. It's a soft, sticky, colorless film that is produced by bacteria. It forms all over your teeth, especially near your gums and in the cracks and grooves in your teeth that are really hard to reach with your toothbrush.
- After a while, plaque hardens into something called calculus, which can only be removed by a dentist or hygienist. If you keep the plaque away you'll never have to worry about calculus.

### What does it do?

- Whenever you eat sugary foods, the bacteria in plaque change the sugar to acid. Because plaque is sticky, it holds acid to your teeth. The acid causes cavities.
- Also, bacteria in plaque irritate your gums, making them red and painful. This is called gingivitis. Do your gums sometimes bleed when you brush your teeth or floss? That can be an early sign of gingivitis.
- If you don't get rid of plaque and calculus, your gums can pull away from the teeth, forming little pockets that can become infected. This can get worse as the gum disease infects the bone that holds your teeth in your mouth. If it continues, your teeth will loosen and you'll lose them.

### How to get rid of plaque

One way to see plaque is to chew a small, red disclosing tablet that you can get from your dentist. After you brush your teeth, chew a tablet. Your teeth will turn red wherever there is plaque. Be sure to brush and floss the red parts every day.

## Fluoride

### What is it?

Fluoride is a substance that is very helpful in preventing cavities because it makes teeth stronger and more resistant to acid.

### How do you get it?

- Fluoride occurs naturally in all water supplies and in some foods. Many communities add extra fluoride to their water so it can fight cavities. Ask your parents or grandparents how many cavities they have. Chances are you have a lot less tooth decay because you have fluoride in your water.
- Another way to get the fluoride you need is by using a toothpaste or mouthwash with fluoride.
- Your dentist or dental hygienist can give you a fluoride treatment. Your dentist can also give you fluoride tablets if he or she thinks you need them.

## Brushing

### How to brush

Brushing is one of the most important things we can do to help keep plaque away. Can anyone tell me how they brush? You should brush back and forth using small strokes, and brush into your gums. Brush both the inside and outside of your teeth. Try to reach those little cracks and crevices where plaque can hide. Don't forget to brush your tongue, too! You should brush twice a day for two minutes, and brush and floss before bedtime.

### Toothpaste

There are lots of different types of toothpastes available at the store, but it's very important to use a toothpaste with fluoride. Can anyone tell me why?

### Toothbrush

It's important to select the proper toothbrush too. You should buy a brush with soft, rounded bristles. Soft bristles don't hurt your gums. Don't let your toothbrush get too old. Get a new one every three months or when the bristles get bent out of shape.

### Flossing

- What kind should you use?

Brushing alone doesn't always clean hard-to-reach areas, so it's very important to floss your teeth. Flossing is an easy thing that you can do to protect the sides of your teeth and your gums. Dental floss comes in all types: flat or round, waxed or unwaxed, even flavored. Any kind will do, just as long as you remember to floss.

- How to floss

The best way to floss is to take about two feet of floss and tie both ends together to form a circle. Hold the floss with the third, fourth, and fifth fingers of your hand and guide it with your thumb and forefinger. Slide the floss gently in between your teeth and under your gums and move it up and down. It might be a little hard if your teeth are crooked or close together. If that's true, then ask your dentist for help.

## Conclusion

We know that it is very important to take care of our teeth. We've learned that our teeth's biggest enemy is called plaque. What is plaque? What happens if we don't get rid of it? Do you remember how we get rid of it? What kind of toothbrush should we use? Do you remember how to floss?

We've also learned how important fluoride is to our teeth. How do we get fluoride? If we brush and floss every day, and get rid of plaque, we'll be able to keep our smiles healthy for a long, long time.

## Special Activities

- Instruct students to discuss dental health with their parents and grandparents who may not have had the benefit of fluoridated water. How does it differ from their own?
- Cover your hand with tempera paint, then use a toothbrush to wash it off. Show students that a toothbrush will not clean in between fingers. Use a piece of string or yarn to clean between your fingers.
- Use new dental terms on spelling quizzes and exams.
- Instruct students to write a short skit about children who do not brush or floss. What happens in their mouths?