

Smile Appeal:

How to Get and Keep a Winning Smile



An Oral Health
Discussion Guide
for Grades 5-8

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Smile Appeal: How to Get and Keep a Winning Smile

AN ORAL HEALTH DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR GRADES 5-8

Introduction

Let's talk about an important subject, your teeth and dental health. Try to imagine what it would be like not to have any teeth, or to have teeth that are stained and dingy looking, or to have teeth that hurt all the time. Think about how you'd look and feel if your teeth weren't healthy. You can quickly understand how important it is to take good care of them. With simple daily routine care and visiting your dentist two times a year, you can keep your teeth healthy for a lifetime.

When your friends look at you and talk with you, one of the first things they notice is your smile. Your smile says a lot about you. The shape of your teeth and gums has an awful lot to do with the quality of that smile.

When you think about what it means to be healthy, what comes to mind? You might think of exercise, it's important to get a lot of exercise, to be active and participate in sports or take dance classes to keep your body in good shape. You also might think of eating right. It's important to eat fresh fruits and vegetables, drink lots of milk and stay away from potato chips and candy. And of course, you've probably heard how unhealthy it is to drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes or chew tobacco. All of these things are important for good health. But did you ever think of taking good care of your teeth and gums as an important part of your overall health? If you do everything else, but don't take care of your teeth and gums, you can't be a truly healthy person. Dental health is critical to overall health.

The basics of home care

Benefits of brushing

- Brushing helps eliminate plaque, a sticky, bacterial film that's always forming in your mouth. Plaque is not only a direct cause of tooth decay, it's also a major contributor to gum disease, the number one cause of adult tooth loss.
- Brushing keeps your teeth and mouth clean and bright, and your breath fresh.
- You should brush at least twice a day (for two minutes each time), but preferable also after every meal.

Why should you floss?

- Flossing does what brushing can't. It cleans spaces between the teeth where toothbrush bristles can't reach.
- There are many kinds of floss available: waxed or unwaxed, extra-fine, regular, ribbon and flavored. It doesn't matter what kind you use, as long as you actually use floss every day. It's been said to only floss the teeth you want to keep.
- As a partner to brushing, flossing helps prevent both decay (cavities) and gum disease. You may have some early signs of gum disease already. Do you ever notice that your gums bleed when you brush? Do your gums ever feel tender or swollen? Flossing, in addition to brushing, can often reverse this condition or prevent it from getting worse.

Fluoride

- Always use fluoride toothpaste that has the ADA Seal of Acceptance on it.
- Fluoride prevents cavities by strengthening and protecting tooth enamel from acid.
- Sources of fluoride include toothpaste, community water supplies, over-the-counter mouth rinses, gels and solutions applied by a dentist, and drops and dietary supplements available from a dentist.

The basics of professional care

- Get a dental check-up twice a year.
- Professional cleanings by a hygienist or dentist cleans teeth more thoroughly than you can yourself, and are necessary to remove bacteria and tartar that you cannot remove yourself.
- A professional check-up also allows your dentist to examine your teeth, gums and mouth to make sure there are no problems or potential problems. The dentist will check for tooth decay and make sure any fillings you have are in good condition. If the dentist thinks it's necessary, he or she might take X-rays of your mouth. X-rays help find problems such as tooth decay in between teeth. Dentists usually examine your neck and jaw as well to make sure all is in good working order.

Sports protection: athletic mouthguards

- Wear some kind of mouthguard at all times while training and competing in any sport, particularly contact sports such as football, basketball, hockey, wrestling or boxing.
- There are several types of athletic mouthguards. Dentists can custom fit mouthguards on a routine trip to the dentist, or you can buy store-bought mouthguards that you bite into to conform it to your teeth.

Orthodontics

You probably think braces are ugly, but in fact, there are many benefits, even some good news about the way they look.

- Braces and other types of orthodontic treatment improve the appearance of teeth for the rest of your life. You'll have straighter, more even-looking teeth.
- Orthodontics improve your dental health and your overall health. Some orthodontic problems make it hard to bite and chew and can interfere with eating. Other problems can promote cavities or gum disease by making it hard to clean teeth.

Types of braces:

- Traditional metal braces.
- Transparent or tooth-colored plastic braces which have thinner wires.
- Removable braces that need to be worn only a certain number of hours each day or night.

Cosmetic dentistry: a process called bonding

- Bonding can fix cracked or chipped teeth, fill in gaps between teeth and cover dark stains caused by certain medications given to you as a child.
- First the dentist applies a gel solution to the affected tooth. This roughens the enamel, allowing other materials to bond to it, hence the term “bonding.” A liquid plastic material called a resin is then painted onto the etched surface, where it holds firmly in place. The resin, or tooth colored filling, is then shaped, hardened with a special chemical or special light, and then polished.

Conclusion

I hope you remember to take good care of your teeth and gums. Brush two times a day for two minutes each time, floss daily, see your dentist twice a year and your smile will be as attractive as it can be. You’ll look good, you’ll feel good and you’ll keep your teeth for a lifetime. If you have more questions, ask your dentist for more information.

Special Activities

- Ask students who have braces to talk about their experience.
- Ask students who have had cosmetic dentistry or bonding done on their teeth to talk about their experience.