

# Teeth, Disease and Injury



An Oral Health  
Discussion Guide  
for Grades 4-6

Compliments of



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# TEETH, DISEASE AND INJURY

## AN ORAL HEALTH DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR GRADES 4-6

### Introduction

We all know that brushing and flossing helps keep our teeth healthy, right? But what exactly happens when we don't take care of our teeth? How do the diseases that affect our mouth begin? We also can hurt our teeth by not protecting them when we participate in sports.

Today we'll take a look at things that can harm our teeth so we can learn how to protect them. We'll talk about: tooth decay and how it starts; the two most common types of gum disease; bad habits that can hurt our teeth; how smoking cigarettes can affect us; and the ways we can injure our mouths and how to handle it if we do have an accident.

### Tooth decay

Tooth decay begins when acids are created by the bacteria found in plaque. Plaque is the soft, sticky, colorless, odorless substance that forms on everyone's teeth. It collects at the gumline and in the little grooves and crevices where your toothbrush can't reach. Acids then attack the enamel, or hard covering, of your teeth and cause you to have a cavity.

### Gum disease

- **Gingivitis.** Gingivitis is a mild yet potentially serious form of gum disease in which, the bacteria found in plaque irritates gums. Your gums begin to redden, swell and bleed. Do your gums bleed when you brush your teeth? You may have the first stages of gingivitis.
- **Periodontitis.** Periodontitis is a serious form of gum disease. Your gums begin to pull away from your teeth, creating little pockets that can get infected. Bone is destroyed, and your teeth loosen and fall out. The older you get, the more likely it is you'll get periodontal disease, but kids can get it too.

### Bad habits: what are they?

There are many bad habits we have that can hurt our teeth and keep them from growing properly.

- Do any of you know someone who sucks their thumb? It could really hurt their teeth.
- Do you chew on your pencils or pens? That could be dangerous to your teeth and gums.
- Do any of your sisters or brothers or your parents tell you that you grind your teeth in your sleep? Grinding your teeth wears them down and makes the muscles in your mouth sore.
- Other bad habits include chewing on ice, biting your nails and crunching on unpopped popcorn kernels.

## Tobacco

### Cigarettes

We all know smoking cigarettes is bad for your body, but did you know that it's also bad for your mouth? People who smoke have a greater risk of getting mouth cancer. They can also develop serious forms of periodontal disease.

Smoking also makes your breath smell bad, your teeth turn yellow and it dulls your senses of taste and smell. Do any of your parents or brothers and sisters smoke? Maybe you should let them know about the bad things smoking does to their mouth.

### Smokeless Tobacco

How many of you have seen your favorite baseball player chewing smokeless tobacco? Chewing smokeless tobacco is also bad for you because it puts you at risk of getting oral cancer.

## Injuries

### Accidents

Every year kids hurt their mouths during accidents, many of which could have been prevented.

- A lot of injuries are caused by falling.
- You could also be hit in the face by a hard object. Who plays baseball? Have you ever seen anyone throw the bat? That's very dangerous because it could hit someone.
- It's important to wear a seat belt when you ride in a car because it can keep you from hitting your mouth if you have an accident.
- One of the reasons why we tell you not to run or play rough in the halls is because it could be dangerous to your mouth. Can you imagine what would happen if your friend was taking a drink at the water fountain and you pushed him? That could potentially damage his teeth.

### Mouthguards

One of the most important things you can do to protect your teeth is to wear a mouthguard when you participate in sports. Dentists recommend you wear a mouthguard when you participate in football, hockey, basketball, baseball, soccer, gymnastics, martial arts, rugby, lacrosse and skiing. The best kinds of mouthguards are the kinds your dentist can make you.

### Emergencies

If you do get a tooth knocked out, there are several things you can do. First, rinse the tooth in warm water and try to put it back in its socket. If you can't do that, put the tooth in a glass of water or milk. Get to the dentist right away. If you can see a dentist within 30 minutes, there's a good chance you'll keep your tooth.

## Conclusion

Because your mouth and teeth are important, it's necessary to learn about the diseases that can affect them and the types of activities that can damage them.

Can anyone tell me what plaque is and what happens when it comes in contact with sugar? What are the two most common forms of gum disease? What kinds of bad habits hurt your teeth? What should you do when you participate in sports? How does tobacco affect your mouth? What should you or your parents do if you get a tooth knocked out?

By learning about the things that can hurt our mouth and teeth, we can keep our smile healthy and strong.

## Special Activities

- Instruct students to write a list of the dangerous activities that could harm their mouths. Have them draw pictures of those activities.
- Invite a dentist to come visit your class to discuss smoking and oral cancer.
- Instruct the students to write a skit about a careless student who hurts his or her mouth. What can students do to prevent accidents from happening?