

Back to school smiles

Back to school is a good time to “brush up” on your oral health. Dental health affects not only our mouths but can impact our overall health and well-being so it is extremely important that we teach our children at a young age how to care for their teeth and gums.

The 2009 Canadian Health Measures Survey revealed the following:

- 2.26 million school-days are lost annually due to dental visits or dental sick-days
- 57% of 6-11 year olds have or have had a cavity
- 59% of 12-19 year olds have or had a cavity
- The average number of teeth affected by decay in children ages 6-19 year olds is 2.5

When preparing for their child’s return to school, the New Brunswick Dental Society encourages parents to help children fight off tooth decay by simply teaching them good oral health habits. Tooth decay (five (5) times more common than asthma!) can impact a child’s ability to focus, learn or even attend class. The good news is it is entirely preventable.

Daily brushing and flossing, making healthy food and drink choices and visiting the dentist for an examination are key preventive strategies. Tooth decay is the most common chronic disease in children and adolescents. Learning strategies for maintaining healthy teeth and gums can lead to better overall health. The following are a few helpful tips:

Brush more not harder – Children should brush their teeth in the morning and at bedtime with a soft brush and fluoride toothpaste for two to three minutes. This is a simple preventative measure that should be reinforced early on as part of a daily health routine.

Pack tooth-friendly foods for lunch and snacks - Cheese, carrot and celery sticks, fresh fruit or plain yogurt provide a healthy choice for a child's lunch box. Avoid soft or sticky foods that can cling to teeth and minimize snacking throughout the day.

Think about what they drink – In addition to sugar, pop and other carbonated beverages contain acids that can eat away tooth enamel. Even "diet" drinks which don't contain sugar are acidic and can be harmful to teeth. Milk and water are better options during meal times and water is always the best option, especially for drinking throughout the day.

Lead by example – Good dental health begins at home. Parents can demonstrate the value of good dental health by practicing their own healthy habits.

Start early – Good dental care starts early. In fact, the best time for the first dental visit is recommended between six months and one year of age, or within six months of when you see the first tooth.

Visit your dentist – Regular visits to the dentist will help to create familiarity and comfort for children. Dental disease is a progressive disease (that cannot be reversed). Early diagnosis through a regular dental exam can minimize disease progression and work to reduce the impact and cost of treatment. Looking for a dentist? Find one here: http://www.nbdental.com/en/e-find_a_dentist.cfm .

When shopping for back-to-school clothes and supplies, if you have a budding athlete in your family, be sure to consider adding a mouth guard. A mouth guard covers the teeth and helps to prevent injuries to the teeth, lips, cheeks, tongue and jaw, as well as concussions. If you are not sure what type of mouth guard to get, talk to your dentist. Also add new toothbrushes on your list. A child's toothbrush should be changed every three months or immediately after an illness.

The NB Dental Society is pleased to be able to work with the Province to improve the oral health of New Brunswick families through programs like "*Healthy Smiles, Clear Vision*" (*hyperlink: http://www2.qnb.ca/content/qnb/en/departments/social_development/promos/healthy_smiles_clear_vision.html*). This program will have a positive impact on the cost of our provincial health care system, creating healthier, happier New Brunswickers.