

THE ORAL HEALTH EXPERT

In celebration of National Wellness Month, we reveal the surprising connections between oral health and overall health and help parents prepare for back-to-school dental screenings.

DELTA DENTAL OF ARIZONA

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School Lunch Can Pack a Sugar Punch



Many parents think packing a brown bag lunch for their child is a healthier option than sticking with the school lunch menu. That can be true – as long as you're mindful about the items you include! Try these easy swaps to reduce the amount of sugar in your child's packed lunch.

- 1. Say no to sugar**
Ditch the regular cups of applesauce and grab a natural version with no added sugar or opt for a scoop of calcium-packed cottage cheese. Throw some blueberries or sliced strawberries on top of the cottage cheese for an added treat!
- 2. Opt for real fruit**
Fruit snacks may seem like a good idea – after all, many of them use real fruit juice. But fruit snacks and fruit leathers are gummy and sticky, which means bits of them will cling to teeth long after lunch is over. Over time, this can lead to cavities. Pack real fruit, such as a banana, clementine or apple slices, instead.
- 3. Choose plain milk**
Drinking any kind of milk will help kids reach their recommended daily amount of calcium, which helps build strong teeth. But getting them to drink plain instead of chocolate- or strawberry-flavored milk will help decrease the amount of sugar in their lunches.

If you're in the habit of throwing in a package of crackers or a bag of chips as a side snack, you may want to reconsider. Starchy foods break down into glucose just like candy and cookies. So even if the food doesn't seem inherently sweet, it can have the same results. Looking for nutritional alternatives with some crunch? Try sunflower seeds, almonds, baby carrots or popcorn.

DON'T MISS THIS BACK-TO-SCHOOL ESSENTIAL



While you may be busy getting ready to send your children back to school, life will likely get even busier once school starts. That's why now is a good time to schedule a dental visit for your children. It's not only good for their health, but it may even be required by law.

Why screenings are important

Dental screening requirements were passed in some areas to emphasize the importance of oral health for children and to prepare them for the school year. Screenings are also designed to identify which children are in need of treatment.

Oral diseases can interfere with learning, lead to missed school days and cause unnecessary pain. In fact, 29% of parents with kids in school said their child missed class due to an oral health issue in the past year, according to a Delta Dental survey.¹

Tooth decay is the most common chronic condition among American children.² Early detection and treatment of dental diseases can help keep problems from becoming more serious and costly to treat.

Schedule a thorough oral exam for your children

An oral health screening can be done by several health care professionals. However, a simple screening is not as thorough as an examination performed by a licensed dentist.³

At a dental exam, your dentist will identify any issues and recommend treatment. In addition to the exam, you can get your children's teeth cleaned to help prevent future issues. These preventive services are often covered at 100% by dental plans.

Your dentist will help your children understand the importance of brushing, flossing and eating healthy and also show them the proper techniques for taking the best care of their teeth.

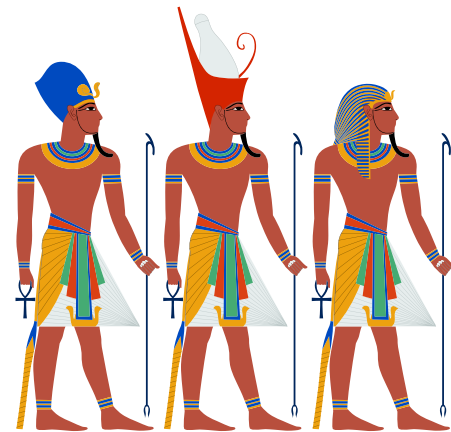
See if you have a dental screening law in your location

If you live in the District of Columbia, California, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Nebraska, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Utah or West Virginia, your children may be required to have a dental screening.⁴

SMILE STATS



Frankly, my dear, he wore dentures. Clark Gable lost most of his teeth to gum infection when he was just 32.⁵



It's believed Egyptians used a paste to clean their teeth about 7,000 years ago — before toothbrushes were invented.⁶



Ed Helms' missing tooth in *The Hangover* is missing in real life. He wears an implant that was removed for the role.⁷



How Your Mouth Influences Your Health From Head to Toe



A healthy smile improves social interactions, communication and the ability to perform well in work and school. But there are many more reasons to maintain great oral health. The National Academy of Medicine reports that oral health is connected to good overall health and oral diseases can make health problems outside of the mouth worse.

Links to other diseases

Poor oral health has been linked to several heart issues. Studies have found that oral health complications can lead to an increased risk of heart disease. People with gum disease have nearly double the risk for heart disease as those with healthy gums, according to the American Academy of Periodontology.⁸ Chronic inflammation from gum disease may also raise cholesterol levels. Poor dental health may also increase your risk of a bacterial infection in the blood stream, which can have an effect on your heart valves.

Gum disease appears to be more frequent and severe in diabetics. In addition, people with gum disease have more difficulty controlling their blood sugar levels.

Additional effects

Untreated oral diseases can lead to problems with eating, speaking, learning and productivity for children and adults.⁹ Oral problems can also lead to bad dietary choices that can damage overall health.¹⁰

Additional issues connected to oral health include a link between premature birth and low birth weight to expectant mothers with gum disease. In addition, American children miss millions of school days and adults miss an estimated 164 million hours of work due to oral health problems each year.¹¹ And, mostly untreated, often preventable, oral diseases send more than 2.1 million Americans to the emergency room each year.¹²

Preventing gum disease

Gum disease appears to have a connection with many of these negative effects on overall health. And nearly half of U.S. adults have some degree of gum disease.¹³

Gum disease, along with most oral diseases, is almost entirely preventable. Be sure to brush your teeth twice a day, floss daily and visit your dentist regularly. With an oral exam, your dentist can potentially detect signs of more than 120 diseases, including heart disease and diabetes.^{14,15} Early detection can make treatment easier, less costly and even lifesaving.

MOUTH-HEALTHY RECIPE: CHEESY BARBECUE CHICKEN ZUCCHINI BOATS

Ingredients:



4 medium zucchini
sliced in half lengthwise
1 1/2 tablespoons olive oil
2 cloves of minced garlic



1/2 red onion, diced
1 pound chicken breast cooked and shredded
1 cup low-sugar barbecue sauce
1 1/4 cups shredded sharp cheddar cheese

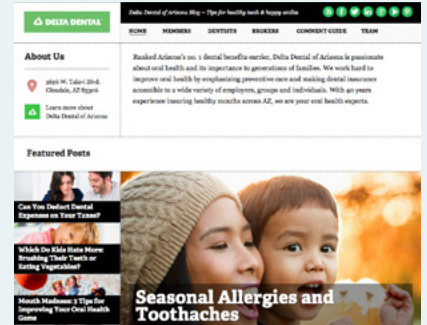
Directions:

Preheat oven to 400°F. Grease a 9x13 pan with olive oil.
Scoop out centers from zucchini, leaving a 1/4-inch rim to create boats. Place zucchini in pan and brush with a tablespoon of olive oil. Add 1/2 tablespoon of olive oil to skillet and place over medium heat. Add garlic and onions; sauté for 3 to 4 minutes. Transfer to a large bowl and stir in cooked chicken, 1/2 cup barbecue sauce and 1/2 cup cheese. Spoon mixture evenly into zucchini boats. Top each with 1 tablespoon barbecue sauce and 1 1/2 tablespoons cheese. Cover with foil and bake for 35 to 45 minutes or until cheese has melted and zucchini is tender.

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SOURCES

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