

# THE ORAL HEALTH EXPERT

Take the fright out of Halloween by learning to outsmart cavities. We explore ways to beat your sweet tooth and how to calm kids at the dentist.

DELTA DENTAL OF ARIZONA

OCTOBER 2018

## OPEN WIDE SEE WHAT'S INSIDE



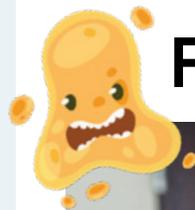
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## Fighting the Plaque Monster



**It attacks your teeth. It can be hard to get rid of. It's invisible. It may sound like the star of the latest monster movie, but plaque is actually a completely normal problem that affects everyone.**

Plaque is a naturally occurring film of sticky bacteria that covers the surface of your teeth. When sugars or starches in your mouth come in contact with plaque, the bacteria produce acids that can attack your teeth for more than 20 minutes after you've finished eating. Over time, these attacks will break down tooth enamel, promoting decay. If not removed, plaque can harden into tartar and eventually lead to gum disease.<sup>1</sup>

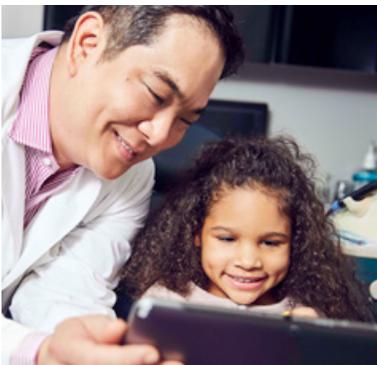
Don't worry, though – there are ways to fight the evil plaque monster. Brushing and flossing away plaque twice daily is a good start, of course, and fluoridated toothpaste also helps protect teeth from decay. Not sure if you've removed all of the plaque? Chewable tablets are available that will tint the existing plaque in your mouth, making it much more visible and therefore easier to target when brushing and flossing. Smearing a little food coloring on teeth with a cotton swab will work the same way.<sup>2</sup>

Some foods naturally combat plaque with their nutrients or by stimulating saliva flow, so grab some cheese, milk, plain yogurt, green or black tea or sugar-free chewing gum to help fight off buildup.

# Calming your kids at the dentist

One of the most important ways to keep your kids cavity free, especially during the season of sweets, is to see the dentist regularly. Routine checkups and cleanings are completely covered by most dental plans, so there's no reason to skip a visit.

There's one deterrent, though, that you might run into – kids getting spooked by the dentist. If this happens to your children, check out our tips to help make their next appointment a little easier.



# SMILE STATS



The American Dental Association recommends babies see the dentist no later than their first birthday. Visiting at a young age can help kids feel more comfortable at the dentist.<sup>6</sup>



On average, children consume 3 whole cups of sugar during Halloween! Be sure to watch how much your little ones are eating this season.<sup>7</sup>



Babies prefer sweet flavors from the time they're born. Teach your kids to tame their sugar cravings to promote better oral health.<sup>8</sup>

- 1 Fewer sugar cravings.** The American Dental Association recommends children visit the dentist within six months of their first tooth or by age 1.<sup>3</sup> Early visits give kids a chance to become familiar with the dentist and may help reduce anxiety down the road.
- 2 Lead by example.**<sup>4</sup> If you're nervous about the dentist, your kids might pick up on it and adopt the same attitude. According to a study in the International Journal of Pediatric Dentistry, adults can transfer their dental fears to family members. Make a conscientious effort to demonstrate a positive attitude toward the dentist while articulating the value of regular visits. By modelling relaxed behavior, you can let your kids know there's nothing to be afraid of.
- 3 Leverage entertainment.** Reshape their attitudes with the power of the page. Pick up library books that explain dental appointments in kid-friendly language. Popular options include *Curious George Visits the Dentist* by H.A. Rey, *Just Going to the Dentist* by Mercer Mayer and *Open Wide: School Tooth Inside* by Laurie Keller. To build even more positive associations with the dentist, try bringing their favorite toy or game to appointments.
- 4 Take baby steps.**<sup>4</sup> Stop by the dental office beforehand so your kids learn what to expect in a lower-pressure situation. Introducing them to the dentist and staff without the stakes of an actual appointment can help them feel more comfortable in the environment.
- 5 Practice beforehand.**<sup>4</sup> Create a mock dental visit in your own home to remove any confusion they have about what happens in the dental chair. Pretend to clean your child's teeth while explaining how visiting the dentist helps keep their smiles in tip-top shape.
- 6 Use relaxation techniques.**<sup>5</sup> If you've tried everything and your kids still get the heebie-jeebies in the dental chair, don't fear! Try calming them down with some simple relaxation exercises. Instruct your child to inhale and exhale slowly and steadily. You can also try a technique where they tense different muscle groups as tight as can be, then release.

It may take some time, but helping your children feel comfortable at the dentist will make lifelong dental care much easier in the long run.

# TRICKS TO OUTSMART YOUR SWEET TOOTH



It's Halloween night, and your kids have returned from trick-or-treating with their sugary loots. Before digging in, consider the cavity-causing effects that candy can have on teeth. Enjoying sweets in moderation and managing your cravings can help you avoid tooth decay.

Start taming your sweet tooth by learning how much sugar is OK to eat. The Food and Drug Administration recommends no more than 12.5 teaspoons, or 50 grams, daily for those over the age of 3.<sup>9</sup> Because the sugar contents of fun-sized candies vary from 2.4 grams to 14.5 grams, there's no general rule for how many you can eat each day.<sup>10</sup> Check the packaging and brand websites to calculate the number of candies you should limit yourself to. And remember to factor in the added sugars from all the other foods and drinks you consume. It adds up fast!

If you reach your daily limit but the candy bowl is still tempting you, try these tips to defeat the craving:

- ❖  **Chew sugar-free gum.** Popping in a stick of sugar-free gum instead of a bonbon helps in a couple ways. A study by Louisiana State University found that chewing gum may reduce snack cravings.<sup>11</sup> It's also useful for cleaning your mouth. Gum washes away leftover food particles and reduces acids that threaten tooth enamel.<sup>12</sup>
- ❖  **Distract yourself when a craving hits.** Taking a walk has been shown to reduce the urge to eat treats. Plus, it gets you away from the candy bowl.<sup>13</sup> You know what they say – out of sight, out of mind. And if you don't feel like taking a stroll, do an activity like giving yourself a pedicure. Pick something fun that rewards you for skipping the sweets.
- ❖  **Keep healthy substitutes close by.** When you really want something sweet but already ate too much sugar, choose naturally sweet foods like fruits and vegetables. Apples, cherries, bell peppers, carrots and others will give you the taste you want along with the nutrients you need.<sup>14</sup>
- ❖  **Eat at consistent intervals.** You might have heard the saying, "You're not you when you're hungry." Well, that's especially true when choosing foods. If your tummy's grumbling, you might make unhealthy decisions like reaching for a candy bar instead of a nutritious snack. Eat every three to five hours to keep blood sugar in check and maintain a level head.<sup>14</sup>
- ❖  **Power up with protein.** Low protein levels can cause you to start craving sugar. Your body wants an energy boost and sugar is a quick source.<sup>15</sup> Plan to get protein throughout the day with foods such as beans, eggs, nuts, fish and lean meats.<sup>16</sup>

Even with moderation, good oral health habits are still essential for avoiding cavities. Clean your teeth and gums after consuming sugar by brushing for two minutes with fluoride toothpaste and flossing. If you aren't able to sneak away to the bathroom, chew sugar-free gum and drink plenty of water.

# MOUTH-HEALTHY RECIPE: SUGAR-FREE MOCHA MOUSSE

Ingredients:		Directions:
		Whip cream in a mixer until stiff peaks form and set aside. Melt chocolate in a microwaveable bowl or over low heat on the stove in a saucepan. Add coffee and coffee extract to melted chocolate and mix well. Pour chocolate mixture into whipped cream and stir until well combined. Refrigerate for 30 minutes to thicken mousse. If desired, enjoy with sugar-free whipped cream!
2 cups heavy whipping cream	6 ounces sugar-free chocolate bars	
		
½ cup coffee, cooled	1 teaspoon coffee extract	

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[deltadentalazblog.com](http://deltadentalazblog.com)



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## SOURCES

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- <sup>2</sup><http://oralhealth.deltadental.com/Children/General/22,DD34>
- <sup>3</sup><http://oralhealth.deltadental.com/Search/22,DD132>
- <sup>4</sup><http://www.foxnews.com/health/2014/02/23/afraid-dentist-tips-to-calm-your-childs-dental-fears.html>
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- <sup>6</sup><http://oralhealth.deltadental.com/Child/Preventive/22,DD132>
- <sup>7</sup><https://www.thisinsider.com/how-much-sugar-the-average-kid-consumes-on-halloween-2017-10>
- <sup>8</sup><https://livesmartohio.osu.edu/food/vanderhoof-11osu-edu/born-to-crave-origins-of-the-sweet-tooth/>
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- <sup>10</sup><https://www.popsugar.com/fitness/Calories-Halloween-Candy-Fun-Size-Treats-5452936>
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