



Learning to Grow

MAKING A DIFFERENCE TOGETHER

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII' I ♥ WINDWARD COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Promoting Healthy Dental Care

Your child's teeth are an important part of keeping your child healthy. Strong, healthy teeth help your child to speak clearly, chew and digest foods, and make her look her best.

Hawai'i has one of the highest rates of dental caries (tooth decay) in the nation, according to the Hawaiian Islands Oral Health Task Force. The best way to prevent tooth decay is to promote healthy dental habits when children are young. The following are some guidelines that promote children's healthy teeth:

- ♥ Brush and floss teeth everyday.
- ♥ Use a small pea-sized dab of toothpaste on the brush.
- ♥ Never share toothbrushes.
- ♥ Eat healthy foods that contain calcium, such as cheese, yogurt, and milk.
- ♥ Visit the dentist regularly (starting when your child's first teeth come in).



This newsletter provides dental care information for each age group along with activities you can do with your child to help encourage healthy dental habits.

In This Newsletter:

To support you in fostering your child's healthy development and school readiness, this newsletter includes:

- ♥ **Age-specific information and suggestions** about activities to do with your infant, toddler, or preschooler,
- ♥ **Featured activities** for each age group,
- ♥ **How This Helps:** a summary of how your child develops when you do these activities together,
- ♥ **Community Resources:** for more information about this topic, and
- ♥ **Suggested Books:** a list of books to read with your child.



Infants

For some babies, their first tooth may appear as early as three months old, while it may take more time for other babies' teeth to come in. Regardless of when your child's teeth emerge, you can promote healthy dental habits with your child from early on. Even though you can't see them,



her teeth are actively developing; therefore, close attention needs to be taken for their care.

Cleaning your baby's mouth with a soft cloth creates an easier transition to cleaning her teeth using a toothbrush once her teeth begin to appear. Clean your baby's mouth after nursing or bottle feeding. Use this time to bond with her and turn it into a learning experience. Look into her eyes, speak in a soothing voice, and describe what you are seeing and doing.

The following are some additional tips to promote healthy dental care for your infant:

- ♥ Avoid putting your baby to sleep with a bottle.
- ♥ Give your baby water instead of sugary drinks such as juice.
- ♥ Provide opportunities for your child to drink through a straw.
- ♥ Don't let your child share pacifiers, spoons, or anything else that she puts in her mouth.
- ♥ Make the time spent cleaning your child's teeth and/or gums a fun experience by singing songs or making noises to engage your child.

Activity for Infants: *Massage My Gums*

Materials:

Soft washcloth, cotton, or gauze strip

What to Do:

1. Wash your hands before you do this activity.
2. Wrap the gauze, cotton or cloth around your finger and dampen it with water.
3. Gently put your finger inside your baby's mouth. Wipe the upper and then the lower gum pads once.
4. While massaging your infant's gums, sing:

I'm going to massage, massage, massage, your gums
 Massage, massage, massage your gums,
 Massage, massage, massage your gums,
 Show your nice clean smile.



(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps her development and school readiness.)

Toddlers

Start introducing toothbrushing once your child's first tooth begins to emerge. Starting this practice early in life helps her develop a toothbrushing routine. Your toddler will need your help with brushing her teeth because she doesn't yet have the skills to do it herself.

Ideally, you should brush her teeth three times each day; however, the most essential times to brush are in the morning and before bedtime at night. Here are tips to help with the tooth brushing process:

- ♥ Make brushing teeth enjoyable for her. For example, have a step stool so that she can comfortably reach the sink and have her toothbrush in her favorite color.
- ♥ Talk about the process of brushing teeth. Describe brushing her bottom teeth in a circular motion and then proceed to brush her top teeth.
- ♥ Model the toothbrushing process; have her watch you as you brush your teeth and have her practice on a stuffed animal.



- ♥ Have her practice brushing while you are there. You can demonstrate on her teeth, then give her a turn.

In addition to these ideas, start talking to your child about what keeps teeth healthy: eating nutritious foods and brushing and flossing teeth daily.

Activity for Toddlers: *Lego Flossing*

Adapted from: <http://www.colgate.com>

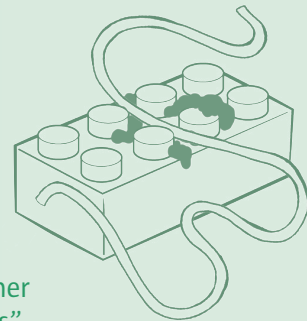
Materials:

Lego® or similar building bricks
Play dough
Yarn or string

What to Do:

1. Your toddler may have a hard time flossing her teeth, but this may make her less fearful about letting you help. Use the play dough to put some “debris” in between the prongs of the building blocks, much like plaque that gets stuck between teeth.
2. Demonstrate how to wrap the “floss” (yarn) around your fingers, pull it firm and then use it to remove pieces from between the “teeth” (Lego blocks).
3. Encourage your child to do the same, helping by holding her hand and giving directions.
4. While you are flossing the “teeth,” talk about how the floss is getting rid of the plaque.

(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps her development and school readiness.)



Preschoolers

Educate your child about dental care by talking and reading books on this subject together. This will help your preschooler understand why it's important to keep her teeth healthy. Use everyday routines with your child such as brushing teeth and meal times to talk about dental care. For example, while you both are getting ready to brush your teeth, discuss why it is important to



brush and floss. When preparing meals, talk about foods (fruits, vegetables, and dairy items such as yogurt, milk, and cheese) that help keep our teeth healthy and strong.

The following are some additional tips to promote healthy dental care for your preschooler:

- ♥ Familiarize your child with her teeth. Use a small mirror and help your child examine and count her teeth. Point out the different types of teeth (front teeth, molars, etc.) and show her why it's important to brush all around her mouth. Discuss the color of her teeth. Ask her, "Why are your teeth white?" "What happens if you do not take care of your teeth?"
- ♥ Look at books or pictures or go to a pet store or the zoo to learn about the teeth of different animals: dinosaur, elephant, horse, lion, shark, rabbit, and goat. Discuss how their teeth are different from hers.

Activities for Preschoolers: *Hardboiled Egg Experiment*

Adapted from: Kaneohe Public Health Nurses

Materials:

- Hardboiled egg with white shell
- A glass
- Can of cola or dark soda
- Toothbrush
- Toothpaste
- Ladle or spoon
- Brown colored crayon

What to Do:

1. Together with your child, carefully place a hardboiled egg into the glass.
2. Pour the cola into the glass, making sure that the egg is fully submerged. Leave it overnight.
3. The next day, have your child take the egg out of the glass with a ladle or spoon. Talk about what she sees. Ask her, "What happened?" "Why do you think it turned this color?"
4. Provide your child with toothpaste and a toothbrush. Have your child brush the brown egg. Give direction on how to brush to get the egg shell white again. Explain to your child how the egg represents a tooth. Ask her, "What might happen if you do not brush your teeth?"



(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps her development and school readiness.)

How This Helps

The activities suggested in this newsletter help promote many different aspects of development:

Physical Development

- ♥ Develop eye-hand coordination
- ♥ Learn to use her body with intention

Social and Emotional Development

- ♥ Develop a close bond with you
- ♥ Feel important and good about herself

Language and Literacy Development

- ♥ Develop early reading skills and a love of reading
- ♥ Learn to ask and answer questions

Cognitive Development

- ♥ Develop her thinking and problem-solving skills
- ♥ Develop her curiosity about how things work



Kids in the Kitchen

Cooking teaches valuable lessons. As you do this recipe with your child, show her how to safely handle the items and allow her to do as much as she is capable of. Ask questions throughout the process to encourage her thinking skills. Make sure to wash your hands and your child's hands before preparing any food.

Frozen Yogurt Pop

Adapted from: kidshealth.org

Ingredients:

- 1 8-oz. container of your favorite flavor of yogurt
- Small paper cups
- Wooden chopstick
- Carrot sticks
- Plastic wrap
- Favorite fruits like fresh blueberries or bananas, sliced

Instructions:

1. Have your child pour/scoop her favorite yogurt into paper cups. Fill the cups about $\frac{3}{4}$ full. Then, add fruits to the cups.
2. Talk to your child about the texture of the yogurt.
3. Stretch a small piece of plastic wrap across the top of each cup.
4. Using a chopstick, poke a hole in the plastic wrap. Stand a carrot stick straight up in the center of the cup.
5. Put the cups in the freezer until the yogurt is frozen solid. When you take the frozen yogurts out, ask her about how the texture changed from when you first put the cups in the freezer.
6. Enjoy!



Community Resources

American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry

<http://www.aapd.org/parents/>

Provides links to find a pediatric dentist in your neighborhood, oral hygiene topics, and parent education resources.

Mouth Healthy Kids

<http://www.mouthhealthykids.org/en/activity-sheets/oral-health-made-easy>

This website is created by the American Dental Association with a variety of activities to teach about teeth and how to take care of them.

Healthy Smiles Hawai'i

<http://www.healthysmileshawaii.com/index.html>

Local online resource for important dental and oral health information.



Suggested Books

Recommended by **Hawaii State Public Library** www.librarieshawaii.org.

Infants and Toddlers

Brush, Brush, Brush! (Rookie Toddler) by Alecia Padron

Infants and toddlers alike will love to pick this simple, rhythmic text. This book is visually stimulating with its bold art work, photos, and illustrations. At the end are some suggested activities to try with your little one.

Brush Your Teeth, Please: A Pop Up Book by Leslie McGuire

Children will enjoy learning how to brush their teeth with a chimp and flossing with a shark. This pop-up book will engage your youngster and get them excited to learn about dental hygiene.

Preschoolers

Bear's Loose Tooth by Karma Wilson

Bear has a loose tooth and his friends help by teaching and helping him understand that it is a natural process to lose a tooth.



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