



THE NATIONAL CENTER ON
Health



Brush Up on Oral Health

August 2013

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Did you Know?

A child is at risk for tooth decay as soon as the first tooth starts coming in. Tooth decay can be prevented when good oral health habits start early.

Home visitors can help families understand the importance of oral health. They can also teach families how to keep their teeth healthy.

Oral Health and Home Visits



Home visiting is a method for delivering comprehensive services to families in Early Head Start and Head Start.

During home visits, families (pregnant women, parents, and children) can learn important information to keep themselves healthy and safe. Visits can cover health, child development, parenting, home safety, and how to get health care and social services.

Common oral health issues discussed during home visits include personal oral health care, healthy food choices, tooth decay, and dental visits. Some of these topics are covered in earlier issues of *Brush Up on Oral Health*.

This issue of *Brush Up on Oral Health* discusses promoting oral health during home visits. It also offers simple tips for talking about oral health during visits.

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Why Promoting Oral Health During Home Visits Is Important

Sharing information about oral health with families shows that a healthy mouth is important. A woman who takes care of her mouth and gets a dental checkup when she is pregnant is more likely to stay healthy and have a healthy baby. A child whose teeth are brushed twice a day with fluoridated toothpaste, who is fed healthy foods during regularly scheduled meals and snacks, and who is taken for dental checkups is more

likely to stay healthy, too. Children with healthy mouths are more likely to be free from pain and infection, able to eat healthy foods, and able to learn better.

Home visits are ideal for sharing ways to promote good oral health. The home visitor can learn what the family knows about oral health. It is also important to find out how the pregnant woman cares for her teeth and how parents care for their child's teeth. This helps the home visitor give each family information that meets the family's needs.

Promoting Oral Health During Home Visits: What Head Start Staff Can Do

Here are simple tips for promoting oral health during home visits:

- **Build comfort and trust.** Use simple questions to introduce oral health that the pregnant woman or parents can answer in their own words (avoid yes or no questions). Be supportive and encourage good health behaviors. Learn how health decisions are made. And find out what motivates the pregnant woman or parents to change behavior.
- **Tailor education.** Ask the pregnant woman or parents what oral health information would be useful to know and what information is confusing. Make sure the oral health message meets the family's needs. Ask permission before offering suggestions. Use visuals, [educational materials](#), and hands-on activities to reinforce messages.
- **Help set goals.** Help set one or two realistic goals and develop simple strategies to increase the family's chances of success. Praise the goals and strategies. Be sensitive to why the pregnant woman or parents may resist setting goals. Respect the family's decisions.
- **Follow up.** At future home visits, check the family's progress toward meeting goals. Offer encouragement and support. Review key messages, and show home oral health care techniques if needed. Work as a team to find ways to solve any problems.



Home visitors can benefit from training on how to help families improve their oral health during home visits. Training and resources on home visiting are available through the [Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center](#); state Head Start associations; and state health and social service programs. Local oral health professionals may be able to provide training, too.

Cook's Corner: Recipes for Healthy Snacks

Cucumber Snake

Ingredients

- 1 cucumber, sliced and cut in half
- 3 black olives, chopped into small pieces
- ½ red bell pepper, chopped into small pieces
- 2 cups low-fat ranch dressing (¼ cup per serving) for dipping sauce



Directions

1. Place 10 pieces of cucumber end to end in the shape of a snake.
2. For the eye, put one piece of bell pepper with one piece of olive on top of it on the first cucumber slice.
3. For the tongue, put one piece of chopped bell pepper in front of the first cucumber slice.

Serves 8.

Note: For safety, an adult should chop the ingredients. For children under age 3, modify foods that may cause choking (for example, finely chopping raw vegetables).

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View all issues of Brush Up on Oral Health at [Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center](#).

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