



THE NATIONAL CENTER ON
Health

Brush Up on Oral Health

September 2013

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Finding Oral Health Care

To stay healthy, it's important for pregnant women and children to get oral health care. But some pregnant women and children have trouble getting care. Common problems include the following:

- Not having a way to travel to the dental office or clinic
- Not having dental insurance or enough money to pay for care
- Not being able to take time off work
- Not being able to find a dentist who will see pregnant women or children
- Not being able to find a dentist who accepts Medicaid or the State Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) for dental insurance

Misbeliefs also keep pregnant women and parents from seeking oral health care for themselves and their children. Two common misbeliefs are:

- It's not safe to receive oral health care during pregnancy
- Baby teeth don't need to be treated because they're going to fall out

This issue of *Brush Up on Oral Health* discusses why regular dental visits are important. It also offers tips for helping families find oral health care.

Did you Know?

A child who has his or her first dental visit early in life is more likely to:

- Visit a dentist regularly
- Get more preventive care
- Have fewer fillings and emergency dental visits



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Why Regular Dental Visits Are Important

Visiting the dentist regularly has many benefits, such as:

- **Promoting good oral health.** During dental visits, oral health providers ask questions to learn about the pregnant woman's and parents' oral health practices. For example, they may ask if the pregnant woman or child drinks fluoridated tap water or snacks frequently or if parents give the child a bottle filled with something other than water at bedtime. This information can help oral health providers deliver care and provide education to make it less likely that the woman or child will have problems later.
- **Teaching children to value good oral health.** Early dental visits teach a child that oral health is important. A child who is taken for dental visits early in life is more likely to have a good attitude about oral health providers and dental visits. Pregnant women who get oral health care are also more likely to take their child to get care.
- **Finding oral health problems early.** One goal of dental visits is finding problems early. Tooth decay can be stopped or managed if it is caught early. Treating problems early keeps oral diseases from getting worse and costs less than treatment would later. Treating disease early is also important because oral disease can be transmitted from mother to baby through saliva. See [Brush Up on Oral Health, December 2012](#).

Helping Families Find and Use Oral Health Care: What Head Start Staff Can Do

There are many resources in the community to help families find and use oral health care. Here are some useful tips:

- **Find out if pregnant women or children have public insurance.** Medicaid and CHIP pay for oral health care for children enrolled in these programs. And some, but not all, state Medicaid programs pay for oral health care for pregnant women. Head Start staff can direct pregnant women and parents to Medicaid and CHIP program staff or others who can determine if they qualify for public insurance.
- **Encourage oral health providers to provide care for pregnant women and children enrolled in Head Start.** Many oral health providers do not know about Head Start. Even if they do, they might not realize how much Head Start stresses oral health in daily activities and parent education. Head Start staff can visit oral health providers to teach them about Head Start. For useful tips, read [Dentists and Head Start: What You Should Know and How You Can Help](#) and [Dental Hygienists and Head Start: What You Should Know and How You Can Help](#).
- **Coach parents on how to find and talk with oral health providers.** Pregnant women and parents may be uneasy about calling a dental office or clinic to set up an

appointment. They may also be unsure about what questions to ask or what information to share about their own or their child's oral health. Head Start staff can help pregnant women and parents practice how to make an appointment or how to talk about themselves or their child before they call or visit the dental office or clinic.

For additional information for parents, see [Questions to Ask When Looking for A Dental Office](#).

Cook's Corner: Recipes for Healthy Snacks

Here's a delicious healthy snack that children can make as a class project or at home with their families.

Applesauce

Ingredients

6 apples, peeled and cut into 1-inch cubes

¼ cup water

½ teaspoon cinnamon

Directions

1. Place apples in a microwave-safe bowl.
2. Add water.
3. Cover and microwave on high for 15 minutes.
4. Stir apples.
5. Uncover and microwave until apples are very tender, about 5 minutes.
6. Crush apples with a fork or potato masher.
7. Add cinnamon and stir into apple mixture.



Photo credit: Stacy Spensley | Foter.com

Safety tip: If children are too young to read or follow written directions, they are too young to use a microwave without supervision.

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

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