



# Brush Up on Oral Health

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## May 2019

- **Smoking and Oral Health**
  - **Oral Health Problems Related to Smoking**
  - **Strategies to Help Parents and Pregnant Women Quit Smoking**
- **Cook's Corner: Pepper Poppers**

## Did You Know?

- Smoking can harm nearly every organ in the body.
- Secondhand smoke can cause health problems in babies and children.
- Quitting smoking has many health benefits, including lowering the risk of losing teeth and of having oral cancer.



## Smoking and Oral Health

Not smoking or quitting smoking is important for overall health, including oral health. When a smoker quits, it improves their health and quality of life and the health and quality of life of those around them, especially young children.

This issue of *Brush Up on Oral Health* describes some oral health problems related to smoking that can affect parents, pregnant women, and children. It offers tips Head Start staff can use to help parents and pregnant women quit smoking. A recipe for a healthy snack that can be made in the Head Start classroom or at home is also included.

## Oral Health Problems Related to Smoking

Long-term use of products containing tobacco and/or nicotine can result in serious health problems, including cancer and heart and lung diseases. Smoking traditional cigarettes, e-cigarettes, cigars, pipes and water pipes, as well as using smokeless tobacco, can cause these diseases. Using tobacco products also affects oral health.

- **Tooth decay.** Smokers can have more tooth decay than non-smokers. The nicotine in tobacco slows down the mouth's ability to make saliva and creates dry mouth. Saliva helps prevent tooth decay by washing food and bacteria from the teeth. It also helps repair very early stages of tooth decay. Also, young children who are regularly exposed to secondhand smoke have higher rates of tooth decay in their primary teeth, compared with those who are not exposed.

- **Gum disease.** Gum disease is an infection of the gums that can affect the bone structure that holds teeth in the jaw. In severe cases, gum disease can make teeth fall out. Smoking causes gum disease because it weakens the body's ability to fight infection, making it hard for gums to heal. Smokers are twice as likely to develop gum disease as non-smokers, and treatment may not work as well as for non-smokers.
- **Oral cancer.** Tobacco use increases the risk of oral cancer in the lips, tongue, cheeks, floor of the mouth, hard and soft palate, sinuses, saliva glands, and throat.
- **Poor birth outcomes.** Pregnant women who smoke are more likely to have miscarriages, babies born too early, or babies with low birthweight. They also are at higher risk for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. Smoking during pregnancy also increases a woman's risk of delivering a baby with cleft lip and/or cleft palate (when a baby's upper lip or roof of the mouth does not join completely during pregnancy).
- **Stained teeth, bad breath, and loss of taste and smell.** Nicotine and tar in tobacco stain teeth and can turn them yellow. Smoking is also a common cause of bad breath, and it affects ability to taste and smell.

## **Strategies to Help Parents and Pregnant Women Quit Smoking**

- **Help families understand the impact of smoking on health, including oral health.** Ask the family if anyone smokes. Getting this information and discussing the hazards of smoking with pregnant women, parents, and other family members who smoke can be a first step in helping the family establish a tobacco-free environment and in creating a quit-smoking action plan. A podcast series focusing on the importance of a smoke-free home and car is available in [English](#) and [Spanish \(español\)](#).
- **Share methods to quit smoking.** Use motivational interviewing to share information about the dangers of smoking and to assess pregnant women's and parents' willingness to quit smoking. The Motivational Interviewing Suite in [English](#) and [Spanish \(español\)](#) provides information about the approach and how to use it. Smokefree.gov's [Explore Quit Methods](#) describes different methods to quit smoking. It explains which methods are most effective, which are most affordable, and which may have side effects. [Smokefree.gov](#) also offers quit-smoking tools and tips specific to [veterans](#), [women](#) (including pregnant women), [teens](#), [Spanish speaker \(español\)](#), and [adults ages 60 and over](#).
- **Develop and enforce tobacco-free policies.** Tobacco-free environment policies are designed to protect non-smokers from secondhand and thirdhand smoke. The Oregon Head Start Association and the American Lung Association of Oregon developed a [model policy](#) (English only) for early childhood education and care programs seeking to promote a tobacco-free facility. The American Academy of Pediatrics provides resources that Head Start programs can use to inform pregnant women and parents about

the dangers of tobacco and how to establish policies and practices that promote a tobacco-free environment. The resources are available in [English](#) and [Spanish \(español\)](#).

## Cook's Corner: Pepper Poppers

Here is a delicious healthy snack that children can make in a Head Start classroom or at home with their families.

### Ingredients

- 1 large red, green, or yellow bell pepper, seeded, and cut into 8 slices
- ½ cup low-fat cream cheese
- ½ cup plain low-fat yogurt
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- 2 tablespoons green onions, chopped



### Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 375° F.
2. Mix the cream cheese and yogurt.
3. Add the garlic powder and onions and mix well.
4. Fill the pepper slices with the mixed ingredients.
5. Bake for 12–15 minutes.

### Makes 8 servings

**Safety tip:** An adult should slice the ingredients and supervise the use of the oven.

### Contact Us

The National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness welcomes your feedback on this issue, as well as your suggestions for topics for future issues. Please forward your comments to [health@ecetta.info](mailto:health@ecetta.info) or call 866-763-6481.

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**School readiness begins with health!**



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