



Brush Up on Oral Health

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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.
- Head Start staff 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 visits can be an effective way to deliver comprehensive services to pregnant women and children and their families.

During home visits, pregnant women and parents 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.

This issue of *Brush Up on Oral Health* addresses how Head Start staff can promote the importance of oral health during home visits. The issue also includes a recipe for a healthy snack that can be made in a Head Start classroom or at home.

Importance of Promoting Oral Health During Home Visits

Sharing information about oral health with pregnant women and parents teaches them 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 fluoride 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 and are better able to learn.

Home visits are ideal for sharing ways to promote good oral health. Head Start staff can learn what the pregnant woman and parents know about oral health. They can also find out how the pregnant woman cares for her teeth and how parents care for their child's teeth. This helps Head Start staff give each family information that meets the family's individual needs.

Tips to Promote Oral Health During Home Visits

Here are simple tips Head Start staff can use to promote oral health during home visits:

- **Build comfort and trust.** To introduce oral health, ask questions that the pregnant woman or parents can answer in their own words (avoid yes or no questions). Provide simple information in a non-judgmental way. Be supportive and encourage good health behaviors. Learn how the pregnant woman and parents make health decisions. Also, find out what motivates them 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 oral health 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 or determining strategies. Respect the family's decisions.
- **Follow up.** At future home visits, discuss the family's progress toward meeting goals. Offer encouragement and support. Review key messages and reinforce effective personal oral hygiene techniques. Work as a team to find ways to solve problems.



The Office of Head Start offers several resources, including its [Interactive Home Visitor's Handbook](#). This handbook discusses the [Home-Based Program Option](#) service-delivery method. It outlines the relationship-building process with pregnant women and parents, and explains the comprehensive services Head Start staff offers families. The handbook also details how Head Start staff can get support and includes frequently asked questions about the home-based program option.

The [Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting/Early Head Start Home-Based Model](#) also offers an approach and resources for improving child health, positive parenting, and promoting child development and school readiness.

Cook's Corner: Coconut Snowflake

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

Ingredients

- 1 small whole wheat tortilla
- Canola or vegetable oil (just enough to lightly brush on the tortilla)
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon unsweetened coconut flakes

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees.
2. Soften the tortilla in the microwave for 15 to 20 seconds.
3. Fold the tortilla into fourths. Use clean scissors to cut shapes in the tortilla, the same way you would cut a paper snowflake.
4. Unfold the tortilla and place on cookie sheet.
5. Lightly brush the oil on the top of the snowflake and sprinkle with cinnamon and coconut.
6. Bake for 4 minutes or until the coconut turns golden brown.



Makes 1 serving

Safety tip: To prevent burns, young children should not use an oven or stove.

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 or call 866-763-6481.

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School readiness begins with health!



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