



Brush Up on Oral Health

June 2017

- **Promoting Oral Health in Head Start**
 - **Strategies Head Start Staff Can Use to Promote Oral Health**
- **Cook's Corner: Fruit and Cheese Flag**

Did You Know?

- Children begin developing oral health habits early.
- Once a child's oral health habits are set, they often stay with the child for life.



Promoting Oral Health in Head Start

Teaching children and parents about oral health throughout the program year is a valuable service that Head Start staff provide. Repeating messages reminds children and parents about the importance of keeping their mouth healthy and how to do it.

This issue of *Brush Up on Oral Health* provides strategies that Head Start staff can use to promote good oral health among children and parents. A recipe for a healthy snack that can be made in the Head Start classroom or at home is also included.

Strategies Head Start Staff Can Use to Promote Oral Health

Children and parents learn best when short and simple messages are repeated regularly using various learning methods (for example, see-tell-do). Repeating the same messages in ways that stimulate parents' and children's thinking makes them more likely to value and practice good oral health habits. Here are some examples:

- **Use teaching practices that engage children.** Teaching practices that engage children promote thinking and language development. Engaging children in conversation can help them learn new words, think critically, and answer clearly. Some questions that promote thinking and talking about oral health include:
 - How do you brush your teeth?
 - Why do you brush your teeth?
 - What else can you do to keep your mouth and teeth healthy?

- What happens if you don't brush your teeth?
- Tell me about your last visit to the dentist.

For more information on other teaching practices, see the [Framework for Effective Practice: Engaging Interactions and Environments](#) at the [National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning](#).

- **Integrate oral health into activities.** In addition to daily tooth brushing, Head Start staff can include oral health in math, science, reading, and art activities. Some ideas include:

- Creating a graph focused on a question, like "How many times do you brush your teeth every day?"
- Having children separate pictures of foods that are good for oral health from pictures of foods that are high in sugar.
- Helping children learn words by having them match oral-health-related pictures, like teeth, toothpaste, and a smile.
- Teaching children to count and learn colors using toothbrushes.
- Reading books with positive oral health messages to children.
- Having children pretend they are visiting a dental office.
- Singing songs about oral health.



Many curricula for children and parents are available at low or no cost; see [Choose and Use: Head Start Oral Health Curricula](#). The [oral health](#) webpage, maintained by the National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness, also has many resources.

- **Engage parents in promoting oral health at home.** Ideas include:
 - Working with parents to find the best ways to position their child for tooth brushing. Remind parents that young children cannot brush their teeth well until age 7 to 8. It is also important for a parent to brush their child's teeth or help them with brushing.
 - Asking parents to take photographs of their child brushing his teeth and helping the child write stories about his experience.
 - Helping parents choose and prepare foods that promote good oral health.
 - Encouraging parents to ask their child what she learned about oral health in Head Start that day.
 - Offering parents suggestions for at-home activities that support what children are learning about oral health in Head Start.
- **Participate in or create oral health campaigns and programs.** Each February, the American Dental Association offers educational materials in English and Spanish to celebrate [National Children's Dental Health Month](#). Other groups like Sesame Workshop's

[Healthy Teeth, Healthy Me](#) initiative offer resources in English and Spanish. And many state health departments sponsor campaigns with resources available to the public. Head Start staff can use materials from these and other sources in classrooms and during socialization, home visits, parent meetings, and other events to stress the importance of oral health.

Cook's Corner: Cheese in a Blanket

Here's a delicious healthy snack that can be made in a Head Start classroom or at home with their families.

Ingredients

- 1 low-fat cheese stick
- 1 slice of turkey
- 1 lettuce leaf, washed
- 1 teaspoon mustard



Directions

1. Wrap the turkey slice around cheese the stick.
2. Wrap the lettuce leaf around the cheese and turkey.
3. Dip the wrap into mustard.

Makes 1 serving

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.

Subscribe or view all issues of [Brush Up on Oral Health](#) on the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center.

This issue was developed with funds from grant #90HC0013 for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start, Office of Child Care, and Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau by the National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness. This resource may be duplicated for noncommercial uses without permission.

This publication is in the public domain, and no copyright can be claimed by persons or organizations.

School readiness begins with health!



ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES



NATIONAL CENTER ON
Early Childhood Health and Wellness