



# Brush Up on Oral Health

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## February 2018

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## Did You Know?

- **More than 65 percent of a person's body weight is water.**
- **Not having as much water as the body needs is a common reason for feeling tired in the afternoon.**
- **About 7 out of 10 young children drink only beverages that have added sugar or sugar substitutes. This puts them at risk for tooth decay and other health problems.**



## Water and Health

Water is important for good oral health and overall health and well-being. Drinking water every day helps move nutrients throughout the body, gets rid of waste, gives skin a healthy glow, keeps muscles moving, and promotes a healthy weight.

This issue of *Brush Up on Oral Health* describes why drinking water is important for good oral health. It

provides resources Head Start staff can use to promote drinking water. The issue also offers tips for encouraging children to drink water.

## Drinking Water Is Important for Good Oral Health

- **It strengthens teeth.** Drinking water with fluoride is one of the easiest and best ways to help prevent tooth decay. Water with fluoride makes it hard for the bacteria that cause tooth decay to create acid. Fluoride also strengthens the outer layers of the teeth, making them more resistant to acid attacks. If the local, county, or state health department says not to drink water from the tap, make sure the new water source contains fluoride.
- **It keeps the mouth clean.** Drinking water washes away the bacteria that cause tooth decay and also washes away food left in the mouth after eating. Water also dilutes acids made by the bacteria that cause tooth decay. Even though drinking water helps keep the mouth clean, it is still important to brush the teeth with fluoride toothpaste twice a day.

- **It fights dry mouth.** Water helps create saliva, which is the mouth's first defense against tooth decay. Saliva contains calcium and other minerals that work into the outer layers of the teeth to keep them strong. It also keeps food moist so it can be swallowed easily and clears away food left in the mouth after eating.
- **It does not contain sugar.** Water is sugar-free, so drinking it doesn't allow the bacteria that cause tooth decay to make acid. Drinking water instead of beverages that have natural or added sugar lowers the risk for developing tooth decay.

## Resources Head Start Staff Can Use to Promote Drinking Water



- **Available on Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC)**
  - [\*Encouraging Your Child to Drink Water\*](#) handout ([English](#) and [Spanish](#))  
This parent handout provides tips for encouraging children to drink water.
  - I Like My Teeth posters (English and Spanish)  
These posters are designed to share positive messages about drinking water with fluoride, brushing with fluoride toothpaste, and children's oral health. The posters can be used as a teaching aid in classrooms and at parent events.
    - *Drinking Water with Fluoride* ([English](#) and [Spanish](#))
    - *Fluoride: Cavity Fighter* ([English](#) and [Spanish](#))
    - *Strengthen Your Body: One Glass at a Time* ([English](#) and [Spanish](#))
- **Available from Other Sources**
  - [\*Increasing Access to Drinking Water and Other Healthier Beverages in Early Care and Education Settings\*](#)  
This guide from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention gives information on how to make water available at all times.
  - [\*Potter the Otter Curriculum Toolkit: A Teacher's Guide\*](#)  
This toolkit includes interactive educational materials and activities for use in the classroom and home. It contains books, posters, table tents, stickers, paper puppets, a musical CD, recipe cards, and water pledges.
  - [\*Rethink Your Drink\*](#)  
This website from Action for Healthy Kids gives tips and resources to teach parents about the amount of sugar and calories found in common beverages and their impact on health.

## Cook's Corner: Tips for Encouraging Children to Drink Water

Here are tips for encouraging children to drink water during the day.

- **Make it fun.** Drink from bendy, silly, or colored straws made of paper or that are washable.
- **Keep it portable.** Reusable water bottles that can be washed, carried anywhere, and refilled are great.
- **Flavor it.** Children used to drinking juice, juice drinks, or pop (soda) may think water is too plain. Add a lemon, lime, or orange slice or fresh mint leaves to the water. You can also add fruit like blueberries, raspberries, or strawberries. Remember not to add sugar.
- **Ice it.** Serve water with ice cubes or crushed ice. Look for ice cube trays in fun shapes, like animals, flowers, or stars.
- **Make it available.** Set up a station where children can get a drink of water whenever they are thirsty. It can be as simple as keeping a non-breakable water pitcher or thermos on a low counter or chair where young children can reach it.
- **Model it.** Young children learn by watching. Be a good role model by drinking water instead of drinks that have sugar.



## 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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