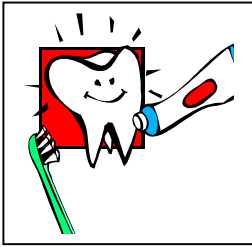


# ORAL DISEASE PREVENTION



## PREVENTING TOOTH DECAY

### Sealants

The top surfaces of the back teeth have deep pits and fissures. These are difficult to keep clean and are vulnerable to decay. One way to help prevent decay on these surfaces is with sealants. Sealants are safe coatings that help prevent decay. They are easy to apply and are placed on permanent molars as soon as they erupt. Talk to your dentist or dental hygienist about sealants.

### Fluoride

Fluoride is a mineral that strengthens the outside of teeth. Strong teeth resist decay. Tooth decay can be reduced by 50–70% with ingestion of proper amounts of fluoride. Many community water supply systems (in Connecticut close to 90%) add fluoride to their water.

Well water, bottled water, and filtered water usually do not contain the right amounts of fluoride to help strengthen teeth. Some local water supplies are not fluoridated. If your water source is not fluoridated, a dental professional should be consulted to arrange for other ways to provide fluoride.

## PREVENTING ORAL CANCER

Stopping tobacco use, limiting alcohol consumption and protection from over exposure to sunlight will help reduce the risk of developing oral cancer. Individuals should routinely examine their mouth, tongue and lips and feel the area around the face and neck for any changes, lumps or discoloration.

Early detection is key to effectively treating oral cancer. When detected early, 76% of those diagnosed with oral cancer will be alive five years later compared to 19% diagnosed at a later stage. The longer it is left undiagnosed, the greater the chance the cancer will spread deep into surrounding tissue and into the lymph glands of the neck. Be concerned about:



- A persistent sore or irritation that doesn't heal.
- Color changes: red or white lesions.
- Pain, tenderness or numbness in the mouth or lips.
- A lump, thickening, rough spot, crust or small eroded area.
- Difficulty chewing, swallowing, speaking or moving the tongue & jaw.
- Change in bite.

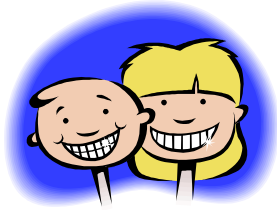
## PREVENTING ORAL AND FACIAL INJURIES

There are many ways to make playgrounds and sports events safer. According to the National Program for Playground Safety, caregivers should ensure that there is proper supervision at all times, that equipment is age-appropriate, that playground surfaces are cushioned, and that the equipment is safe. Caregivers should also ensure that the proper protective equipment is used, provided and required by all organized sports activities.

## ORAL HEALTH PROMOTION

### PROPER NUTRITION AND SELF CARE

Teeth, like bones, benefit from a diet with the right amount of calcium. Eating high amounts of sweets and regularly snacking between meals promotes tooth decay. Having a balanced diet improves overall good health. Oral health is no exception to this rule.



To prevent tooth decay, babies should never be put to bed with a bottle and should not be allowed to drink beverages containing sugars (even milk) all day long. Children should use a cup rather than a bottle as soon as they are able to sit up alone. Both children and adults should avoid snacking between meals and visit the dentist every six months for cleaning and a checkup.

A program of daily brushing and flossing helps prevent oral health problems. The teeth should be brushed using a soft bristle brush at least twice a day. Flossing between the teeth is just as important and should be done at least once per day. It is important not to forget the back teeth and other difficult

places to reach when brushing and flossing.

### **FIRST YEAR = FIRST VISIT**

Building a foundation for good oral health must start early. Children should have an oral health exam before their first birthday. During these early visits, the dentist and dental hygienist will assess proper tooth development and check for other problems. By starting early, caregivers can learn steps to ensure good oral hygiene for their children. Through example, children will learn the importance of oral health care and will see that the oral health visit is a very positive experience.



### **ORAL HEALTH AS WE AGE**

Paying special attention to our oral health is a critical part of feeling good and preserving our quality of life as we age. Continuing to brush, floss and visit the dentist are important steps. We should also learn about the impact of aging on our oral health and take the necessary steps to meet these challenges. Caregivers, dental professionals and medical professionals must remember that the oral health of seniors is just as important as the oral health of children. It is important to take oral health into consideration when planning and establishing treatments for problems associated with aging.

### **PROTECTION**

Stopping tobacco use, limiting alcohol consumption and protection from over exposure to sunlight will help reduce the risk of developing oral cancer. Individuals should routinely examine their mouth, tongue and lips and feel the area around the face and neck for any changes, lumps or discoloration.

Most sports related injuries happen because of poor protection. People who participate in sports should use the proper protective equipment. Mouth and face guards are very effective in preventing injuries to the mouth, head and neck. The American Dental Association reports that over 200,000 football oral-facial injuries are prevented as a result of proper protection. For other sports the numbers are not so good. In baseball, where the use of mouth and face guards is not common or required, 41 percent of all injuries involved the face and head.