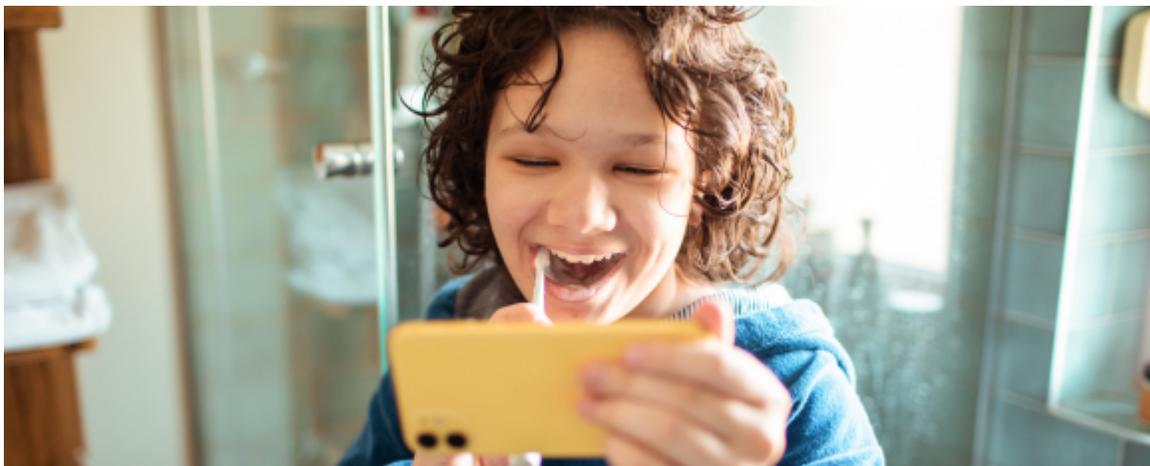


Oral Wellness Newsletter



Tips for maintaining dental routines between homes

Brushing and flossing are the most important things children can do to keep their teeth and gums healthy. If you have shared custody of your dependents, it can be a challenge to maintain a consistent and supervised oral hygiene routine. With the help of these tips, you can find ways to develop a regular routine between homes and help keep those cavities away.

What parents and caregivers can do:

- **Establish a dental routine that both family households can follow.** This could look different depending on the family. Easy solutions that both parents/guardians can agree on come from finding common ground. Like using our free Chomper Chums® mobile app, for example, that helps children follow consistent brushing and flossing techniques no matter where they are.
- **Buy duplicates of toothbrushes, floss and fluoride toothpaste, keeping them at each home.** Switching between a different toothbrush or toothpaste could upset your children's routine, as well as unwanted irritation in the mouth. Find what works best for them and provide it at both homes. As a United Concordia Dental member, you can get 20% off select [Sonicare](#) products, like electric toothbrushes and air flossers for adults and kids.
- **Keep regular dental appointments.** By the age of 12 months, or when the first tooth erupts, children should start having regular dental checkups. Try to schedule their next appointment while at the dental office, so both parents/guardians can know months in advance and plan accordingly, so there are no missed appointments.

- **Check in on teenagers.** If the children in your home are old enough to maintain their own dental routine, it can still help to check in periodically to see if they are brushing their teeth and tongue and flossing regularly.
- **Monitor braces and other orthodontic appliances.** Both caregivers should have their children's orthodontist information in case of emergencies. If they are wearing any orthodontic or other appliances, both caretakers need informed on what routines to follow. This includes, knowing what is safe to eat, and when an appliance should be worn or needs at-home adjustments. Anything removeable, like a retainer, must go with the children between homes.
- **Coordinate a healthy diet.** It's unrealistic to expect caretakers to communicate with each other in detail about everything entering their children's mouths. But, one thing you can do is communicate expectations of [healthy foods](#) being the first option of every meal or snack, and not giving acidic and sugary juice drinks before bed, as this can lead to [gum and tooth decay](#).

Your role as a parent/guardian plays a big part in helping children develop healthy teeth, no matter if you are with them daily or not. To make oral care fun for your children with any of their caretakers considering using this [Baby Book of Oral Health](#).



Sun protection doesn't need to be complicated

While the sun can provide many great health benefits to your body, including the production of vitamin D and a strengthened immune system, it can also cause damage to your sensitive skin and eye layers. This is because the Earth's protective barrier in the atmosphere blocks most of the damaging sun's UV light, but not all of it — UVA and UVB still push through it to reach us. Aside from wrinkles and sunburn, continual unprotected sun exposure is associated with the development of skin cancer, cataracts, cornea damage and vision loss.

To enjoy those sunny days, get your daily intake of healthy sun and keep your skin and eyes protected throughout your lifetime, follow these easy steps:

1. **Avoid long sun exposure.** Avoid long exposure in the sun during the middle of the day. Try to get your healthy dose of sun rays in the morning and evening when the sun's radiation of UVB and UVA aren't as strong.
2. **Find shade often.** Head indoors or under shade during the peak daytime sun hours of 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.

3. **Wear sunscreen daily.** Wear a broad-spectrum sunscreen that has a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) 15 or higher on your face and other areas that are exposed to the sun regularly, even in the winter. If chemical sunscreens worry you, consider mineral-based sunscreens, which the FDA has determined to be generally safe and effective.
4. **Don't look at the sun.** Don't look directly at the sun with your eyes, and wear UV protectant sunglasses outside often, especially during times when it's very sunny.
5. **Keep your routine, even on cloudy days.** The sky can trick you. Even on cloudy days, UV light still comes through. On an overcast day, continue to wear sunscreen and sunglasses, and avoid sun exposure over long periods of time.
6. **Wear a hat.** If being out in the sun during peak hours is unavoidable, wear a broad-brimmed hat, UV protectant sunglasses and breathable protective clothing, and reapply sunscreen of at least SPF 30 often.
7. **Protect your animals.** Even your pet can benefit from sun protection. There are FDA-approved sunscreens for dogs and horses that can be easily found at major department stores or online through Amazon. As a precaution, use a test spot on your pet to make sure there's no allergic reaction.

“We often forget that our lips also need protection from the sun. Years of exposure to UV light can cause solar cheilitis, which causes tissue damage around the lips and can lead to ulcers, mouth sores and even cancer. Daily application of a sunscreen lip balm can help keep your mouth healthy and hydrated as you age.” – Your Oral Wellness Consultants: Dan, Gabby and Holley

Protecting your lips against sun exposure is just as important as the rest of your face. [Learn more](#) about the ways sun can affect your mouth.



The best snacks for healthy teeth

We all know that brushing and flossing are vital for your oral health, but consuming a well-balanced diet rich in nutritious, low-sugar foods is also important, especially when you're on-the-go. Many snacks that aren't good for your body are also bad for your teeth.

With the right balance and variety of healthy foods and some planning, you can create healthy eating habits when you're away from home. While we always recommend brushing

after a snack when convenient, here's a list of our favorite tooth-friendly, healthy snacks for when you're out and about:

- **Nuts** – Soft nuts, like peanuts and cashews, are jam-packed with healthy nutrients like calcium and vitamin D, which can help fight bacteria that leads to tooth decay¹.
- **Fresh fruits and vegetables** – Crisp fruits and raw vegetables, such as apples and carrots, can help clean plaque and freshen breath. On top of that, they have a lot of antioxidant vitamins that can help protect gums and prevent bacterial infection².
- **Cheese and other dairy products** – Milk, cheese, yogurt and other dairy products that are low in sugar and high in calcium can help keep bone density and protect against cavities and gum disease¹.
- **Lean proteins** – Most meats, like beef, poultry and fish, have protein and other important vitamins that are good for your oral health. Chewing meat also produces saliva, which decreases acidity in your mouth and washes away particles of food that lead to decay¹.
- **Don't forget the water** – When it comes to hydration, avoid carbonated and sugary drinks, including seltzers, soda, iced tea and Gatorade; instead, try swapping these acidic drinks out with water. Water acts as a buffer that neutralizes the shift in pH from an acidic drink. Drinking water is a natural defense against cavities and helps to wash away leftover food particles¹.

[Learn more](#) about the connection between nutrition and oral health.



Socioeconomic differences in oral care

Oral health in the United States has greatly improved over the years, but some populations may not receive the care they need as a result of Social Determinants of Health – the conditions in the places where people are born, live, learn, work and play³. Some factors that may prevent these groups from receiving oral health care are:

- Can't afford to pay out of pocket for dental care³.
- Do not have private or public dental insurance or other publicly funded programs³.
- Can't get time off from work to receive dental care³.
- Live in communities where they don't have access to good water and school sealant programs².
- Do not have access to healthy food³.

- No access to public transportation to get to appointments³.
- Have a fear, anxiety or phobia of the dentist due to underlying behavioral health issues⁴.

Regular preventive dental care is essential for good oral health, but many don't have access to the care they need³. If left untreated, oral disease can significantly affect quality of life and productivity:

- Over \$45 billion is lost in productivity in the United States each year because of untreated oral disease³.
- Nearly 18% of all working-age adults, and 29% of those with lower incomes, report that the appearance of their mouth and teeth affects their ability to interview for a job³.

[Learn more](#) about oral health disparities among children, adults and seniors in this shareable infographic.

Sources:

[1] The Best Foods for a Healthy Smile and Whole Body; University of Chicago, School of Dentistry, 2018. Retrieved June 2023.

[2] Eat Fruits and Veggies for a Healthy Mouth; University of Chicago, School of Dentistry, 2017. Retrieved June 2023.

[3] Disparities in Oral Health; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021. Retrieved June 2023.

[4] United Concordia Dental internal research and reports, 2023.

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