



## JUNE IS NATIONAL SMILE MONTH

School is out and daily routines change during the summer months for families with children. Oral Health America and the Hispanic Dental Association (HDA), along with dental offices and community care centers, are encouraging children and adults not to forget their toothbrushes on summer vacation.

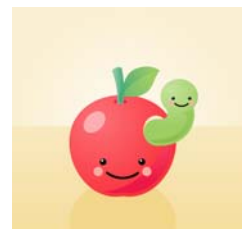
National Smile Month promotes the importance of the simple, yet effective ways to care for the mouth as a part of every family's daily routine:

- + Brush teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste
- + Visit a dental care provider as often as they recommend
- + Choose healthy foods for a tooth-friendly and nutritious diet

As summer's temperature rises, family meals lighten and the need to drink beverages increase for hydration. Frequent snacks help active children stave off hunger. The increased occurrence of eating and drinking offers the juicy stew of germs in the mouth lots to munch also!

Acid-forming bacteria in the mouth called mutans streptococci (MS) cause tooth decay. They thrive on the sugars and starches of foods and drinks that pass through the lips to supply carbohydrates to the hungry germs. The short digestive process of MS changes the carbohydrate to an acid that is released into the mouth. The acid begins to dissolve the outside of the tooth, called enamel. The attack can last up to twenty minutes before it is weakened by the enzymes in saliva. This process starts over again with the next bite of sugary, starchy food or mouthful of sweetened beverage. Soon, the enamel can weaken enough to form a void, or hole, which is a cavity.

Brushing with fluoride toothpaste offers protection in two ways. First, the mechanical action of the brush bristles disrupts the bacteria coating the teeth and thereby reduces their ability to form acid. Secondly, the fluoride mineral in the toothpaste combines with other minerals in the enamel to create a stronger unit, more resistant to future acid attacks. Effective brushing reaching all tooth surfaces for two minutes, two times a day is an important measure to care for the mouth. Challenge children to a two-minute "brushing contest" to see who comes closest in brushing their teeth for two minutes without a timer!



Keep tooth-friendly foods ready for the whole family when the snack-attack strikes. These include fresh fruits and vegetables, yogurt, cheese, eggs, nuts and meat. Watch chips, crackers and pretzels; though not sweet, the starchy residues feed MS. Hydrate frequently with water, the kindest beverage to teeth, and with many municipalities adding optimal fluoride to the supply, water becomes a tooth strengthener. Beware! Pop, sports drinks and flavored waters fall into the acid-containing levels that attack tooth enamel.

When the family is at the park or on a picnic, and cannot brush after eating, reach for sugar-free gum with xylitol. Xylitol is a natural sugar alcohol that sweetens gums and mints, yet reduces the risk of tooth decay. Xylitol is favored by acid-forming bacteria; however, it does not nourish the bacteria, eliminating acid formation and acid attacks on tooth enamel. It is recommended to chew xylitol gum after eating for five minutes, 3-4 times a day. Over a year's period, the use of xylitol can significantly reduce MS in the mouth. Further information is available at [www.xylitol.com](http://www.xylitol.com)



Oral health is an important component of total health. Seek professional advice from your dentist and dental hygienist. Wear a healthy smile everyday!



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