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Dental Health for Children

Trick-or-treating for Halloween candy caps off the month of October for most children, but with the sugary holiday comes the potential for something much scarier than plastic lawn ghosts—cavities and dental bills.

Whether your children are consuming large quantities of sugary treats or not, maintaining dental hygiene is an important habit to teach children. The best time to instill good dental habits is when your child is still young.

- Begin teeth-cleaning as soon as teeth appear in your infant's mouth; this may include using a soft cloth to wipe your child's gums.
- Start brushing when your child's first teeth appear.
- Begin using toothpaste around age 2, but

check with your doctor for specific recommendations.

- Floss for your child starting at age 4.
- Teach your child to brush for him- or herself around age 6 or 7, although you will likely need to continue supervising.
- Teach your child to floss by age 8.

Why Are Clean Teeth Important?

Sugar from food is left in the mouth and on teeth, fueling the formation of plaque. Plaque is a film of bacteria that covers the teeth and gums and can cause gum disease and tooth decay. Brushing and flossing removes plaque and keeps your teeth strong.

Daily Care

- Brush teeth twice a day, making sure the inner, outer and chewing surfaces of the teeth, as well as the tongue, are cleaned.
- Use a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste approved by the American Dental Association (ADA).
- Floss at least daily.

Professional Care Recommendations

The ADA recommends that a child should have his or her first dental visit within six months of the first tooth coming in, but no later than his or her first birthday. Preventing dental problems is always easier than correcting them, and your dentist can also offer suggestions for daily dental care.

After that first visit, dental visits should become a routine part of your child's health care, with a dental visit typically occurring every six months. If you anticipate your child being anxious about the first dental visit, have him or her come along and observe your visit beforehand so he or she knows what to expect.

Park your car so as not to obstruct parents' views of their children as they approach your door.

Halloween Safety

Halloween is a scary time, but the fear should be all in fun. Help prevent a trick-or-treat tragedy by sticking to some basic safety guidelines when handing out treats to the neighborhood children.

- Stick to handing out individually wrapped candy and treats. Many parents are wary of home-baked or unwrapped items.
- Make sure treats that contain common allergens, such as peanuts, are clearly marked.
- Turn on your outdoor light both as a signal that you are handing out candy, as well as to prevent anyone from tripping and falling in the dark.
- Remove any obstacles from the walkways, such as a stray garden hose or unlit lawn decorations.
- Park your car so as not to obstruct parents' views of their children as they approach your door.

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Back to School: Backpacks 101

With the return of the school year, your children are likely shouldering backpacks on their way to the bus and down school hallways. While backpacks are convenient and often necessary, they can also pose a health risk if not used properly.

Backpacks, especially overloaded ones, can strain muscles and joints, causing fatigue and injury to your child. Children should carry no more than 10 to 15 percent of their body weight in their backpacks. To keep your child free from unnecessary back pain, help him or her determine how to keep the load as light as possible. Sort through books and supplies and determine what is necessary for daily use, and encourage your child to take advantage of a locker or other school storage space as much as possible.

Properly adjusting the backpack is important and can help reduce potential back pain or strains. First, choose a backpack that fits your child. A bag that is proportionally too large will not only be unwieldy and difficult to adjust properly, but it is also easier to overfill because the space is available. Also, look for a backpack that has wide, padded straps in order to avoid digging into the shoulders and neck.

Once an appropriate bag has been chosen, adjust the straps to fit the child properly, with the bag resting evenly in the middle of the back. Encourage your child to avoid carrying the bag on only one shoulder, as this can lead to additional strain.

Family Fun for Fall



Enjoying autumn doesn't have to come with a steep price tag. Pull your children away from their schoolwork and take them along on a seasonal family adventure that won't break the budget. Here are some low- or no-cost autumn activities for you to do:

- Go apple-picking and then bake a pie together.
- Take a hay ride and wander a corn maze.
- Pick pumpkins and then carve pumpkin lanterns.
- Roast your own pumpkin seed snack.
- Go for a drive and a fall picnic.

Cranberry Pumpkin Muffins

These tasty cranberry pumpkin muffins are the perfect fall treat to bake on a crisp fall day.

- 2 cups flour
- 3/4 cup sugar
- 3 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
- 3/4 teaspoon allspice
- 1/3 cup vegetable oil
- 2 eggs
- 3/4 cup pumpkin (canned)
- 2 cups cranberries (fresh or frozen chopped)

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Sift together dry ingredients (flour through allspice) and set aside. Beat oil, eggs and pumpkin together until well blended. Add the wet ingredients (pumpkin mixture) to the dry ingredients all at once. Stir until moistened. Fold in chopped cranberries. Spoon into paper lined muffin cups. Bake at 400 degrees for 15 to 30 minutes.

Yield: 12 servings. Each serving provides 200 calories, 7g of fat, 30mg of cholesterol, 230mg of sodium and 2g of fiber.

Source: USDA

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