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## Happiness is a healthy mouth (1976)

American Dental Association

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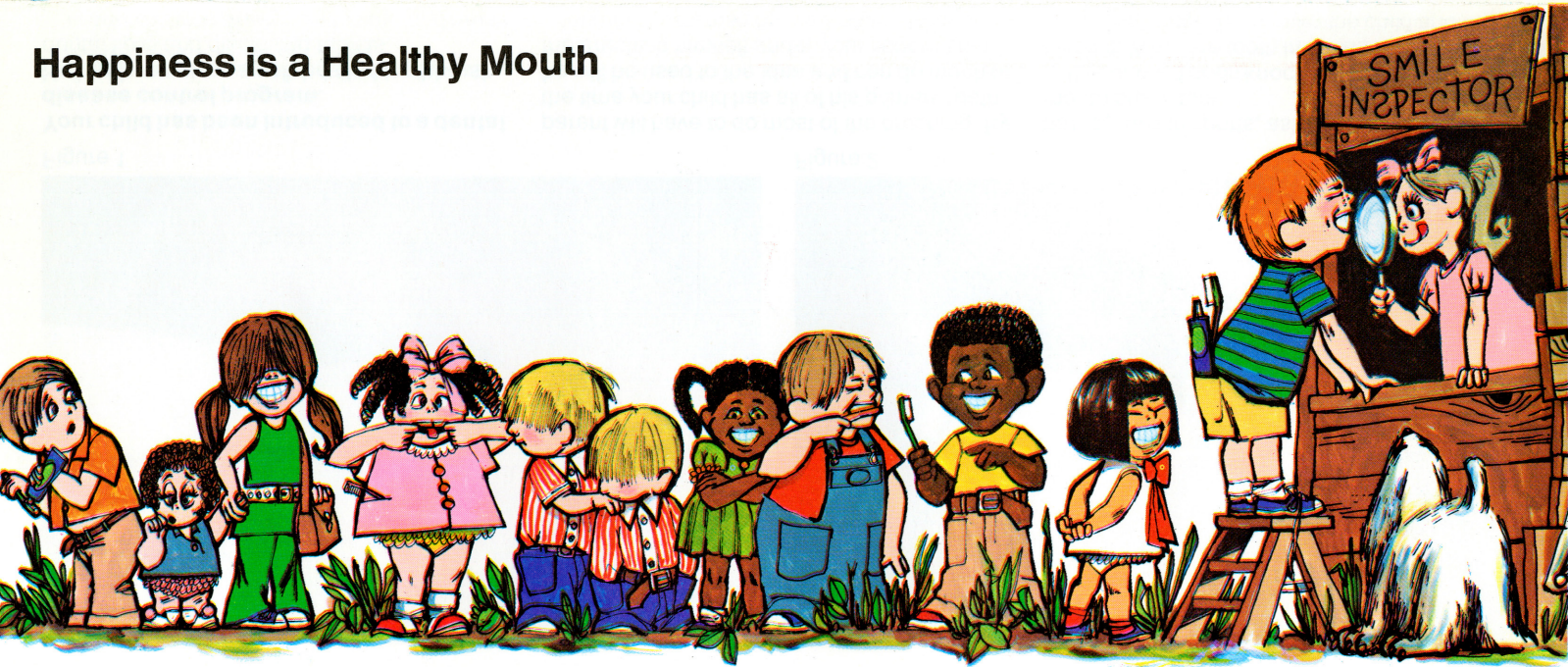
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# Happiness is a Healthy Mouth





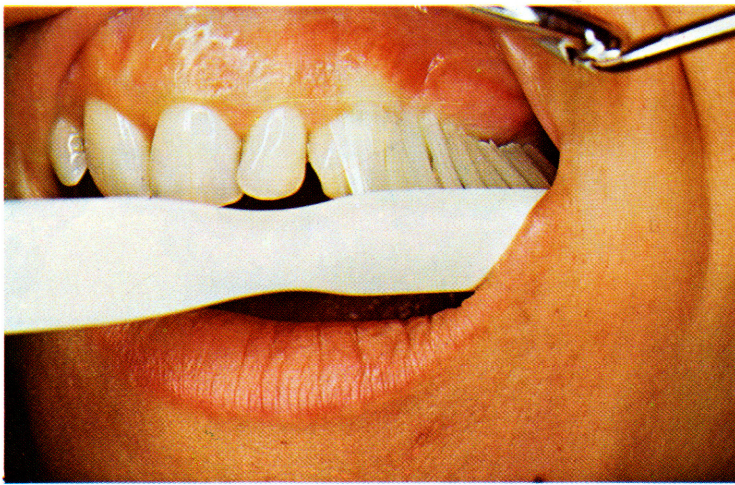


Figure 1

**Your child has been introduced to a dental disease control program.**

He has been given a soft-bristled toothbrush, dental floss and disclosing tablets.

In addition to learning how to floss and brush his teeth, your child has learned how to use disclosing tablets (a vegetable coloring) to see if he has cleaned his teeth thoroughly.

The next step is up to you. With your encouragement, your child can make effective daily dental care a habit.

Often, problems with primary (baby) teeth are ignored since the teeth will be lost eventually. But, primary teeth need the same care as permanent teeth.

Your child needs healthy primary teeth  
for proper chewing  
to preserve space for the permanent teeth  
for good speech  
for appearance.

**What Causes Dental Disease?**

Both tooth decay and periodontal (gum) disease start with dental plaque. Plaque is a sticky, colorless film of harmful bacteria that is always forming on the teeth. It is formed from the bacteria that are present even in a healthy mouth.

Certain bacteria in the plaque change sugars (such as table sugar) into acids. These acids begin the tooth decay process that can cause cavities, pain and loss of teeth. Also, if not removed daily, plaque builds up along the gum line and can cause damaged and inflamed gums (periodontal disease). The teeth loosen and can eventually be lost.

**Toothbrushing**

Plaque should be removed from all tooth surfaces by brushing and flossing.

Your child's toothbrush should have a flat brushing surface with soft, end-rounded bristles. Make sure the brush is small enough to reach every tooth.

Young children in particular are very hard on toothbrushes. Check your child's brush often to make sure it's clean and the bristles aren't bent or frayed. Replace worn brushes.

Some fluoride toothpastes are valuable in preventing tooth decay. Look for the American Dental Association's statement of acceptance on the toothpaste you buy.

A parent should start brushing the child's teeth as soon as he will accept it. At first, the



Figure 2

parent will have to do most of the brushing. By the time your child has all of his primary teeth, he will be used to the idea and can do much of the brushing himself under your supervision.

An effective brushing method to remove plaque is to point the bristles towards the gum line, where the teeth and gums meet (see Figure 1). Move the brush with short, back-and-forth strokes, using a gentle "scrubbing" motion. Brush all of the outside and inside tooth surfaces. On the chewing surfaces, use the same gentle "scrubbing" motion.

**Flossing**

Flossing removes plaque from between the teeth, especially near the gum line—places where a toothbrush can't reach. Your child should be introduced to flossing when he is pre-school age. But, either a parent or an older brother or sister should supervise until the child can floss safely and properly.

Floss should be worked between the teeth with a gentle "sawing" motion. Then, the floss should be slid *gently* beneath the gum line. Never "snap" the floss into the gums! That could injure tissue. Curve the floss into a C-shape and press it against the side of the tooth. Move the floss away from the gum by scraping the floss up and down against the side of the tooth (see Figure 2).

**Diet and Dental Health**

A diet that is good for your child's dental health will also benefit his general health. Get to know the Four Basic Food Groups—vegetable-fruit, bread-cereal, milk, and meat. Your goal should be to make sure that each day your child has at least the following:

- 4 servings of vegetables or fruit
- 4 servings from the bread-cereals group
- 3 servings of milk or milk products
- 2 servings of meat, fish or other protein.

Eating sweets, especially between meals, contributes to decay. How often sugary foods are eaten is more important than how much. The more often sweets are eaten and the longer sugar stays in the mouth, the longer the decay process is kept active.

In place of sugary snacks, substitute foods such as fresh fruit, nuts or raw vegetables. Save sweets for mealtime, when your child will clean his teeth afterward.

**Dental Safety**

Teach your child to play safely. Carelessness or horseplay, such as pushing at drinking fountains can injure the teeth. If your child

participates in sports, ask your dentist about mouth protectors.

If your child does knock out a tooth, *do not clean it*. Wrap the tooth in a clean, wet cloth or place it in water. Then, take the child and the tooth to the dentist *at once*. In some cases, the tooth can be reimplanted. If a tooth is loosened or broken, it should be examined by a dentist immediately to see if treatment is needed.

**The Dentist**

Usually, by the time a child reaches school age, he will have an average of 3 or more decayed teeth. By age 20, 14 teeth will be decayed. Regular professional dental care, begun early, can prevent most of this destruction. Your dentist can

- 1) find problems early when they are easiest and least costly to treat, and
- 2) teach you and your child how to care for his teeth at home.

If a child has regular dental check-ups, the dentist can help him keep his primary teeth as long as they are needed. If a primary tooth is lost too early, the dentist may suggest that a space maintainer be placed so that space will be preserved for the permanent tooth. Sometimes, a primary tooth is kept too long. The dentist may then have to remove it.

Most dentists recommend fluoride treatments, especially if a child has not had the benefit of drinking fluoridated water since birth. Children who drink fluoridated water from birth can have up to two-thirds fewer cavities than other children.

Regular check-ups by your dentist plus effective daily home care by you and your child can prevent most dental disease.

For good dental health between dental visits, your child should:

- eat the right amounts from the four food groups
- avoid sweet snacks
- brush after eating whenever possible
- floss and brush before bedtime
- use an acceptable fluoride toothpaste.



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