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Healthy smile, healthy you: The importance of keeping your child's teeth healthy

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Not always thought of, the health of your children's teeth and gums can have a direct impact on their overall health and well-being. Childhood is a unique and lively stage of development and children live a large part of their world through their mouth ... chewing, tasting, talking, sucking, and smiling.

There are a number of problems that affect the oral health of children, but what about dental problems that contribute to other factors such as poor eating habits, deprived sleep, and lower self-esteem, leaving children with visible dental decay often reluctant to smile or engage in conversation.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, almost 20% of children between 2 and 19 have untreated cavities and more than 50 million school hours are lost yearly due to dental pain. Did you know that childhood cavities are 5 times more common than asthma and about 7 times more common than seasonal allergies?

The major enemy ... SUGAR! Sugar found in baby formula, juice and breast milk starts the cavities process in infancy. Babies develop tooth decay if good feeding habits aren't practiced. Putting a baby to sleep with a bottle might be convenient, but it can harm the baby's teeth. Avoid putting the baby to bed with a bottle, propping a bottle in the baby's mouth, or allowing the baby to feed at will.

Caring for your baby's teeth

Good dental care begins as soon as your baby's first tooth is visible, typically between 4 and 6 months of age. Initially,



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you may want to use a washcloth to clean your baby's gums and teeth, and eventually move to a small toothbrush. Make an appointment to see your dentist as soon as the first baby tooth appears to discuss proper brushing.

Establishing good dental habits in babies and young children is essential. Baby teeth act as placeholders for the permanent teeth that begin to come in at around age six, and damage to them can cause substantial problems later. Baby teeth need to avoid cavities through a child's early years.

Cavities happen when bacteria and food left on the teeth after eating are not brushed away. Acid collects on the tooth, softening its enamel until a hole - or cavity - forms. Brushing and flossing do

a great job of removing plaque and food debris from in between teeth, but the groovy flat surfaces of molar teeth are not so easy to clean. These are often the sites of a child's first cavity.

Preventing cavities

Sugar is all around in children's diets and giving teeth a bath in sugar is a sure way to get cavities. Limit or avoid sugary foods, juices, candy (especially sticky gummy candy, gummy vitamins, or fruit roll-ups), as they can erode enamel and cause cavities. If your kids eat these foods, have them rinse their mouth out or brush their teeth after eating to wash away the sugar. The same goes for taking sweetened liquid medicines.

Through routine dental visits, dentists

can prevent cavities from ever forming by placing a sealant on the back teeth just after they erupt. Children should get their molars sealed as they come in. The sealant is a clear thin coating that acts as a protective barrier sealing out decay. It's a simple and painless process that can last for many years.

Get enough fluoride

Regular use of fluoride toughens the enamel, making it harder for acid to penetrate.

Keeping your child's teeth healthy is a parent's job until at least 10 years of age. Yes they want to exert their independence and do it themselves, but youngsters do not have the manual dexterity to brush well until about age 10. Parents have to check, at least nightly, and go over missed areas. Remember the 2 2 2 rule. Brush for 2 minutes 2 times a day and visit your dentist 2 times a year. Visiting the dentist will also give your child a chance to get used to the dentist and get comfortable with these new surroundings, all of which will make future appointments much easier.

Instilling smart dental habits from the beginning by overseeing brushing and flossing, maintaining regular dentist visits, and providing nutritionally balanced meals without excess sugar is the best way to help ensure that your child grows up with healthy teeth and gums, as well as good overall long-term health.

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The family that plays together...

Families often look for fun things to do together, and few things are more fun than physical activity. Choosing activities that combine fun with physical activity is a great way to bond as a family and get healthy at the same time.

According to Let's Move!, an initiative launched by First Lady Michelle Obama

to make families more physically active. In lieu of toys that promote sedentary lifestyles, give kids toys that encourage physical activity. Erect a basketball hoop in the driveway or go buy new bicycles for the whole family, resolving to go for a nightly ride together.

· **Restrict TV time.** Establish house

· **Schedule physical activities for the weekends.** When planning weekends, parents can schedule a physical activity for the whole family. Make time to go hiking at a nearby park or schedule a family basketball game in the driveway. Such activities are healthy, and they don't have to cost a lot of money, either.

· **Volunteer as a family.** Another way to get up and go as a family is to work with a local nonprofit or charitable organization. Sign the family up for monthly park or beach cleanup projects that get

the family out of the house and moving. Or sign the family up to work at a local soup kitchen where kids can learn the value of helping others while staying on their feet.

· **Let kids plan activities.** One great way to get kids excited about an active lifestyle is to let them plan family activities. Kids who are encouraged to come up with activities, whether it's visiting the zoo or going kayaking as a family, are more likely to embrace those activities.



to fight the problem of childhood obesity, children need 60 minutes of play with moderate to vigorous physical activity every day. Parents know it can sometimes be hard to get kids to disconnect from their devices long enough to get out and play. But Let's Move! notes that kids who are supported by their families or surrounded by others interested in physical activity are more likely to participate in such activities themselves. Families looking to get fit and grow closer can consider the following approaches to live healthier, more active lifestyles

· **Give gifts that encourage activity.** Both youngsters and adults are enamored with the latest gadgets, but tablets and video game consoles won't do much

rules regarding how many hours of television kids and adults can watch each day. Kids will follow their parents' lead with regard to how much television they watch, so parents should be mindful of their own viewing habits, resisting the temptation to plop down on the couch for several hours each night. Don't turn on the television at night until the whole family has engaged in some physical activity.

· **Walk or ride bikes to run errands.** When running errands in town, take the kids along and walk or ride bicycles rather than drive. This is a great time for families to catch up, and walking or riding a bicycle is great exercise for adults and kids alike.

Raise kids to grow up giving

Generosity is something children learn at an early age and can continue into adulthood.

Social media has made charitable efforts as popular as ever, with millions taking part in exercises such as the Ice Bucket Challenge and other ventures meant to raise awareness for charitable causes.

Parents can impart lessons to their youngsters about the importance of giving during the end of the year, when many charities raise their public profiles, or when newsworthy events, such as devastating storms, draw attention to the less fortunate.

Children who learn that they can help others will soon realize they have the power to make a difference. Recognizing that they can make a big change is a very empowering discovery for kids. Here's how parents can foster a love of giving.

· **Choose age-appropriate tasks.** Young children do not have a lot of money, so try to find charitable tasks that allow them to donate their time and skills.

· **Let kids choose the beneficiary of their efforts** because they're more likely to get behind the effort if they feel their input is valued.

· **Lead by example.** Provide a good example by getting involved yourself. Make sure the entire family gets involved with the effort of giving.

· **Let children see where their efforts are going.** If kids see food being delivered to the hungry or pet supplies going to an animal shelter, they can see the fruits of their efforts paying off.

· **Make it a family tradition** that members of the household will donate an item they receive or a small amount of money each month. At the end of the year, the family can deliver those funds and gifts to a charity of choice.

· **Talk about giving at dinner.** Discuss the plight of the less fortunate with your children, focusing on the value of volunteering and helping others.

Children can learn to be generous and give to others at an early age, and those that do are more likely to grow into charitable adults.

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Eight ways to inspire kids to go green

Raising eco-friendly children is less complicated than it once was. From very early ages, today's kids are exposed to environmental topics and how they can do their part to maintain and protect the planet's resources. Between activities at daycare and lessons at school to information they receive from educational television programming, some kids are taking their own environmental initiatives - and involving their parents along the way.

Inspiring children to be eco-friendly can be enjoyable and get those creative juices flowing. The following are eight ways children and their families can work together to protect the environment.

1. Pre-cycle. Kids can attempt to reduce waste by recognizing products that could be wasteful and then avoiding those items. Toys or everyday items with excessive packaging that we use without thinking are just some examples of items that can be pre-cycled.

2. Repurpose. Look at items that normally end up in the trash and find new and fun ways to repurpose them. Children



Today's kids know they can do their part to maintain and protect the planet's resources.

can make crafts out of junk mail, catalogs and old newspapers. Juice boxes or plastic containers can be turned into boats or accessories for dolls and action figures. Use natural materials found in the yard

or on a nature walk to make a fairy garden or imaginative world for small toys.

3. Reuse. Toting lunch or snacks around can be more eco-friendly when reusable containers are part of the equation. Explore the many lunch bags, beverage cups, Thermoses, Bento boxes, and other packaging available. Many are made from recycled materials as well.

4. Walk. Encourage getting around without firing up the car. Walking, jogging, biking, or scootering around the neighborhood is more eco-friendly than driving. Many adventures can unfold when seeing the world from a pedestrian's vantage point, but things are easily missed when riding inside cars or trucks.

5. Conserve water. Lessons learned

in conservation are important. Water is one resource that is crucial to human life. Kids can explore ways to cut down on water consumption or use water more efficiently. The environmental resource Green Lifestyle Changes says that a 10-minute shower with a standard shower head can use upward of 80 gallons of water and generate up to four pounds of CO2 emissions. Simply reducing shower time can save energy and water. There are other ways to conserve as well. Make it a family project to collect rain water to use for washing cars or watering plants.

6. Rent rather than buy. From toys to video games to movies, people have more entertainment options than ever before. And nowadays it's easy to access a fresh supply of entertainment without making purchases that require the manufacturing of new items. Streaming rented content rather than buying packaged versions can reduce waste in a number of ways.

7. Turn off/turn down. Turn off lights, appliances, electronics, and much more when they're not in use. Also, encourage children (of an appropriate age) to unplug certain electronics so appliances aren't consuming electricity while in standby mode, which is called vampire power.

8. Change body care products. Introduce kids to earth-friendly soaps, shampoos, toiletries, and cleaning supplies.

Children are the next generation to take on the task of protecting the planet. When they begin an eco-friendly lifestyle early on, they may be more likely to employ the same strategies in adulthood.

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Begin planning kids' summer recreation now

Many families spend winter figuring out how to chase away cabin fever and endure frigid temperatures until spring and summer mercifully return. Parents thinking ahead to swimming pools and days lounging on the beach can put their daydreams to practical use by planning ahead for their youngsters' summer vacations.

Youth recreational programs and summer camps can bridge the gap in care between the end of school and the day when classes resume. Due in part to high demand, parents who want to place their kids in summer rec programs or summer camps should begin vetting such programs and camps well in advance of summer. The following are a handful of tips for moms and dads who want their kids to have fun and fulfilling summers.

Ask for recommendations

Speak with fellow parents and trusted friends about where they send their children. Personal recommendations can be very helpful, providing firsthand insight into a particular camp or program. Schedule appointments to visit camps that fall within your budget. Take your son or daughter along so he or she can get

a sense of what camp will be like.

Explore all options

Camps come in more flavors than ever before. Certain camps may be faith-based ministries while others may focus on particular sports. Band camps and art camps may appeal to creative kids. Also, there are plenty of general-interest camps that offer various activities without narrowing in on any particular one. Parents may need to choose between a sleepaway camp or day camps, depending on which camp experience they want for their children.

Inquire about camp schedules. While many camps are flexible, day camps do not have the same level of flexibility as after-school programs. Arrangements will need to be made if care is required after regular camp hours. Speak with camp staff to see which types of after-hours programs, if any, are available.

Determine your camp budget

As varied as program offerings may be, camps also can vary greatly with regard to cost. Government-run camps may be less expensive than those offered by private companies. Day camps typically cost less than those that provide room and



board. Find out if a particular organization subsidizes a portion of camp costs. Scouting programs often have a dedicated camp and may offer affordable options for Scouts. Martial arts schools and dance centers frequently offer camp schedules.

If camp seems out of reach, look into local summer recreation programs at parks or schools. Such programs may not be as extensive as those offered by camps, but they can quell kids' boredom and

keep children occupied during the day.

In addition to camp, remember to plan for some free days so children can just enjoy some downtime. Such days can break up the monotony of a routine and provide kids and families time to relax together.

Summer recreation may be far off, but it is never too early to start making summer plans, including finding camps and other activities for kids.

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Creating a kids' fairy garden

Adding a touch of whimsy to gardening can make it that much more attractive to children. Perhaps that is why fairy gardens have become so popular among youngsters. Fairy gardens can be designed in outdoor gardens or in containers that children can nurture and enjoy indoors. Here are six steps to get your fairy garden up and running.

1. Decide where to place the fairy garden. Hollowed-out tree stumps are both contained and outdoors, and kids may feel like the fairies inhabited this neglected area of the yard and made it their own. Otherwise, use containers you already have, such as old pots, hanging baskets, picnic baskets or cookie tins. Wooden birdhouses with their roofs removed also can make for clever places to house the gardens.

2. Fairy houses can take on any theme their creators prefer. Themes help children decide what to include in their gardens. For example, a seaside retreat may work well with little reclining chairs, sea grasses and succulents. You can then complete the theme by adding some seashells and colored stones.

3. Before securing anything in the container or digging into your garden bed,

sketch out a garden design. This gives you an idea of how the finished product will look. Even before planting, gently place plants and other components in their spots and move them around accordingly until you find the desired look.

4. Mixing plants that have different requirements can make it challenging to care for the fairy garden, so select plants that require similar levels of sunlight, prefer similar soil conditions and require roughly the same amount of watering. Herbs are a smart choice because they stay small and are easily maintained.

5. You will need to add a house for the fairies to inhabit. Small bird houses can work, but you also can consider old teapots, bird-nesting boxes or even homemade houses assembled out of bark and twigs. Use your imagination and the garden will take on a life of its own.

6. Invite the fairies. Children can invite fairies to take up residence (fairies often show up at night and tend to remain unseen), or children can create their own fairies using craft materials.

Fairy gardens are a fun way to introduce children to gardening. Once families get started, they may find themselves creating entire fairy villages!

Parents and social media

Parents are increasingly relying on social media to communicate with other parents.



Social media has completely changed the way people communicate. Whether through tweets or status updates, information shared through social media avenues is often instantaneous and reaching a large number of people, which is why many parents have turned to social media to learn about events at school.

According to a study by Nielsen McKinsey Company, parents are more likely than adults without children to play games, engage in creative pursuits, and look for entertainment on Facebook, blogs

and other social sites. The data collected from 2,000 adults (both parents and non-parents) who frequently use social media found 88 percent of users rely on social networking sites for communicating with family and friends. The next most popular activity is connecting with new friends, followed by accessing product reviews and online entertainment. Reports show that adults devote a quarter of their time spent online to social media sites. Parents, in particular, are finding new ways to put these sites to use.

Social media is even enabling them to keep an eye on their children when they go online. According to a survey from Laptop magazine, 55 percent of parents are using social media to watch their kids' online activities. Of that 55 percent, one-fifth indicated they only use social media to monitor their child's online activity.

Many parents use social media to stay abreast of school happenings, when fundraiser money is due or if anyone got the spelling words for the week. Others find it is a good way to meet or speak with the parents of their child's classmates, set up social events, advertise things for sale or ask for recommendations about everything from what to make for dinner to finding a reliable contractor.

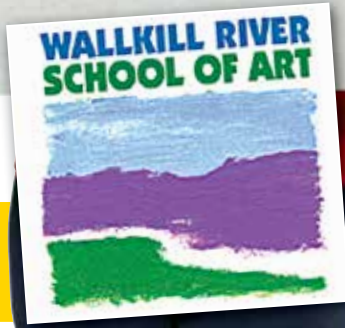
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