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News Release

Good Dental Health Habits Begin Early

Good dental habits begin early. Being a good role-model is one of several things you can do to help children develop good dental health habits.

Are you and your child brushing and flossing your teeth on a regular basis? Brushing and flossing regularly remove plaque. Brush teeth gently twice a day, using fluoride-containing toothpaste. Brush all the surfaces of your teeth with a soft-bristled brush.

By age four, children should be brushing their own teeth morning and night, although parents should supervise and check for proper cleaning. Have children brush their own teeth in the morning and then you brush their teeth at night until they master the skill. Brushing should last at least two minutes. Whether you use a manual or an electric toothbrush doesn't matter - the important factor is that you brush well. The American Dental Association recommends a new brush every three or four months.

Daily flossing between teeth clears away plaque before it can cause damage. Flossing removes plaque at the gum line. Start flossing children's teeth as soon as the teeth touch each other.

Are you and your child visiting the dentist regularly? Visit the dentist at least once a year. Experts recommend that a child's dental care start at 12 months of age. When searching for a dentist find someone you can be comfortable with. The American Dental Association suggests calling or visiting more than one dentist. You may choose to have a separate pediatric dentist for your child.

Are you and your child eating tooth-friendly foods and beverages? A well-balanced diet provides the minerals, vitamins and other nutrients essential for healthy teeth and gums. Pumpkin, carrots, sweet potatoes and broccoli contain vitamin A, which is necessary for the formation of tooth enamel. Eating crunchy vegetables or fruits with the skin can scrub off plaque. These include carrots, apples, cucumbers and many other raw fruits and vegetables. Water cleanses the mouth and keeps gums hydrated. Milk and yogurt are good sources of calcium. Calcium is the main component of teeth. Eating candy or drinking sugary soft drinks allows sugar to stick to teeth. Bacteria present in the mouth feed on the sugar and create the plaque. Acid is a byproduct, and it can damage teeth too.

Good dental care over a lifetime is important because teeth are essential to many aspects of health. According to the Mayo Clinic, these conditions may be affected by oral health: cardiovascular disease, pregnancy and birth, diabetes, HIV/AIDS and osteoporosis.

For more information on dental health visit <http://www.ada.org/public/index.asp>; or <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/dental/>.

For more information on dental health or other health-related topics please contact Donna Shanklin, Regional Extension Agent—Health, at the St. Clair County Extension office at (205) 338-9416 or email drs0009@aces.edu.