

## By gum! Here are some tips to help keep teeth and gums healthy

Good nutrition and healthy eating habits are essential to maintaining optimal oral and overall health. With Halloween just around the corner, the Pennsylvania Dental Association (PDA) encourages parents to be mindful of the amount of candy their children are consuming, and to use this holiday as an opportunity to remind them about the importance of taking care of their teeth and gums.



(Image:Rana2030, via Wikimedia Commons)

The food and beverage choices you make have a direct effect on the health of your entire body. Each time a sugary snack or beverage is consumed, the sugar, along with the bacteria in your mouth, bathes your teeth in harmful acids that attack your teeth for at least twenty minutes. Each bite or sip brings on another acid attack. After repeat attacks, teeth are susceptible to tooth decay.

While it's important to eat a variety of nutritious foods from the five major food groups (grains, dairy, fruits, vegetables and meat/poultry/fish), it's not necessary to throw out everything in your pantry that contains sugar. Almost all foods, including milk and vegetables, contain some form of sugar, and many offer key nutrients that are part of a well-balanced diet. Instead of cutting out sugar from your diet altogether, PDA recommends reading the labels on foods and beverages. Set a goal to reduce the amount you consume that contains added sugars, such as soft drinks, candy and cookies. Soda, whether regular soda containing sugar or diet sugar-free soda, is high in acid content and contributes to the erosion of enamel. Enamel, the hardest substance in the body, protects the inside of the tooth by acting as a barricade.

### Many things parents can do

There are many things parents can do to help promote good oral hygiene habits, both at events such as birthday parties, Christmas and every day. "Doing this makes children less likely to eat candy before returning home," said Dr. Richard Galeone, PDA member and paediatric dentist from Lansdale. A quick search of the Internet will provide many Halloween recipes that are sure to be a hit around the dinner table.

After your children return home from trick or treating, have them select a few of their favourite pieces of candy. Encourage them to donate some of the candy to those who are less fortunate, such as a local homeless shelter. Halloween is also a great opportunity to talk to your children about the importance of practicing good oral hygiene.

### Tips to help keep your teeth and gums healthy:

- Limit snacking between meals. Foods eaten as part of a meal cause less harm to your teeth because more saliva is released during mealtime. This helps to wash food particles from your mouth, lessening the acid build up that leads to tooth decay.
- When you need a snack, make nutritious choices, such as fruit, raw vegetables, cheese, plain yogurt or other snacks that are low in sugar.
- Instead of soda, choose healthy beverages, such as water or milk. Drinking eight to 12 glasses of water a day is recommended and consuming optimally fluoridated water helps prevent tooth decay.
- Brush twice a day with fluoride toothpaste.
- Floss daily to help remove plaque, the sticky film of bacteria, which gets stuck between your teeth and gums.
- Schedule regular checkups with your dentist every six months to help prevent problems from occurring and detect possible problems in their early stages.

"Good oral health is a major component of good general health," Dr. Galeone said. "Consuming a moderate amount of sweets followed by proper brushing, flossing and rinsing is the best way to enjoy the holidays while maintaining healthy teeth and gums."

Kids can learn about good oral hygiene and have fun at the same time in PDA's online Kids' Corner at [www.padental.org/kidscorner](http://www.padental.org/kidscorner). Designed specifically for kids, this section of our website is an excellent resource for children of all ages. It includes interactive games and activities, nutritional information, information on brushing and flossing, answers to frequently asked questions and more.

If you are a parent, don't forget to visit PDA's online Patient Resource Centre at [www.padental.org/patientinformation](http://www.padental.org/patientinformation). The Patient Resource Centre is a great source of information on a wide variety of oral health topics, such as nutrition, caring for baby teeth, what to expect at your child's first dental visit and fluoride.

Source: Pennsylvania Dental Association