

Module 1: “Protect Your Prized Possession!”

20 - 40 minutes

Key Message

Healthy teeth and mouth are important parts of a healthy body. Taking proper care of teeth now helps them last a lifetime.

Student goals

Upon completing this module students should be aware of the three basic steps to good oral health:

- Brush with fluoride toothpaste twice each day, and floss once each day.
- Eat nutritious foods and limit snacks.
- Visit your dentist regularly.

Module Topics (with discussion points and questions)

1. *Value.* Discuss what makes something valuable. [Write down all answers that apply to teeth: can't be replaced, good quality, lasts a long time, looks nice.] What about your teeth? Are they valuable? [Get opinions.] What do your teeth help you do?

Our teeth help us talk, eat and give us beautiful smiles!

2. *Primary and permanent teeth.* How many sets of teeth do people get in a lifetime? [Two.] What were your first teeth called? [Baby or primary teeth.] When you were little you got 20 baby teeth. Why did they fall out? [As children grow they need bigger, stronger teeth.] That's right, as you get older you need bigger, stronger teeth. By the time people are about 18 they have all 32 adult, or permanent teeth. (Show *Permanent Tooth Development*.) How long do permanent teeth last? [Your whole lifetime — more than 60 years with proper care.] If you lose a permanent tooth, will another one grow in? [No.]

We lose our 20 baby teeth and grow adult teeth because we need bigger, stronger teeth to last the rest of our lives. People get 32 permanent teeth, which can last a lifetime with proper care.

ACTIVITY #1: *Challenge Question: Are teeth a good quality product? (Give the calculator to a volunteer.) Here's the question: If you have your adult teeth for 60 years, and you eat three meals a day, how many times in your life will you use your teeth to chew food? [60 years x 365 days a year x 3 times a day = 65,700.] 65,700 chewing workouts — and that's if you don't eat snacks between meals! Now, just for fun, let's say that it takes ten minutes to eat a meal, and that you chew your food fifty times a minute. Can you figure out how many times your teeth would chew during those 65,700 workouts? [10 minutes x 50 chews/minute x 65,700 meals = 32,850,000 chews.] 32,850,000 chews! That's almost 33 million times for each tooth! Do you think your teeth are a good quality product? You bet!*

Permanent teeth can last more than 60 years!

3. *What happens if we don't take care of our teeth?* So taking care of your teeth sounds like a smart idea. What happens to your teeth if you don't take care of them? [Wait until someone mentions "cavities."]
4. *What a cavity is.* Let's talk about cavities and what causes them. What is a cavity? [A little hole in your tooth.] Right. A cavity is another name for tooth decay. What happens when something decays? [Gets rotten, falls apart, loses strength.] It's no different with your teeth. When your teeth decay, they lose their strength. The decay can also spread throughout your tooth.

A cavity is a small hole in a tooth, also known as tooth decay.

5. *What plaque is.* Does anyone know what causes cavities? [You may get a variety of answers, but they may not include plaque.] Those are all interesting answers, but there is one thing that plays a big part in causing decay, or cavities, in your teeth. It is called "plaque." [Write "plaque" on chalkboard.] Sound familiar? If you don't brush your teeth before you go to bed at night, how does your mouth feel when you wake up in the morning? [Tastes bad, smells bad, teeth feel sticky.] That is because plaque has been forming in your mouth all night. Plaque is a sticky, clear film that is forming on your teeth all the time.

Plaque is a sticky, clear film that is constantly forming on your teeth.

6. *How plaque contributes to decay.* Plaque is bad for your teeth because it contains germs. When you eat or drink sugary or starchy foods, the sugars and plaque mix together to make an acid. The acids in your mouth attack your tooth enamel — the hard outer layer of each tooth — and can cause decay. Each acid attack can last 20 minutes, making cavities bigger and bigger. Let's do a demonstration to help us understand how acid works on teeth.

ACTIVITY #2: Acid Attack. Place a Tums® tablet in each of two paper cups. Cover one tablet with vinegar; cover the other with water. Wait five minutes and empty the liquid out of the cups. What has happened to the tablets? The one in the vinegar has dissolved much faster than the one in plain water because vinegar is an acid. Both the Tums® tablet and a tooth contain calcium, and calcium dissolves more readily in acid than in water. [You may need to divide the class into 2 groups so that all the children can see. If possible, recruit another adult to assist with the demonstrations.]

**The sugars and germs in plaque mix together to make acid.
The acids in your mouth attack your teeth and can make cavities.
Repeated acid attacks make cavities grow bigger.**

7. *Repairing cavities.* What happens when someone gets a cavity in their tooth? Does it heal itself? [No. You have to go to the dentist to get it fixed.] That's right. Only your dentist can fix a cavity, by removing the decay and putting a special filling material in the hole.

**Cavities cannot go away by themselves.
They must be repaired by a dentist.**

8. *Keeping teeth and gums healthy.* So what can we do to get rid of the acid? How can you fight plaque and acid and keep those valuable permanent teeth healthy? [List answers which may include brushing, flossing, visiting the dentist, good food and beverage choices.] Let's talk about some of these.
9. *Proper brushing.* Let's list all the good things that happen when we brush our teeth. [Brushing cleans food and plaque off your teeth, fights acid, makes your breath smell good, makes your mouth taste good.] Good answers. How often should you brush your teeth? [Twice a day.] There is a very important ingredient in most toothpastes that helps your teeth. Does anyone know what it is? [Fluoride.] Who knows what fluoride does? [Fluoride prevents cavities by strengthening and protecting the tooth enamel from acid.]

**Brush twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste.
Fluoride toothpaste helps prevent cavities by strengthening
and protecting tooth enamel.**

Move the brush back and forth gently in short strokes. Brush the top, front, and back sides of each tooth. You should also brush your tongue — *very gently!* Really! Your tongue has lots of germs on it that can cause your breath to smell bad.

ACTIVITY #3: Here is a picture of one good way to brush your teeth. It says...
(Show *How to Brush* and read instructions. Ask for questions and comments.)

**Move the brush back and forth gently in short strokes.
Brush the top, front and back sides of each tooth.
Brush your tongue gently, too.**

10. *Toothbrushes.* What kind of toothbrush is best for your teeth? Should it be large or small? [Get several answers.] You're right! You should use a toothbrush is easy to hold and helps you reach all your teeth.

**Use a toothbrush that is easy to hold and
helps you reach all your teeth.**

ACTIVITY #4: (Show *Old and New Toothbrushes* and discuss when to get a new toothbrush.) Here are two toothbrushes. How can you tell if you need a new toothbrush? [If the bristles are bent or broken.] Yes, you should get a new toothbrush when the bristles are bent and worn out. A worn out toothbrush can't clean the plaque off your teeth very well.

11. *Flossing.* Who remembers what dental floss is? [A special kind of string for cleaning between your teeth.] How many of you floss? How many of you floss once a day? Cleaning between your teeth with floss is just as important as brushing. Do you know why? [Flossing cleans between the teeth, where your toothbrush can't reach.] Flossing helps keep your teeth AND gums healthy! Flossing is not as easy to do as brushing, so you might have to ask your dentist, parents or another adult to show you how to do it properly. You should floss your teeth very gently, once a day.

Floss your teeth gently, once a day.

ACTIVITY #5: Show floss and explain the technique used in *How to Floss*.

12. *Good nutrition.* How does what we eat or drink affect our teeth? [Get a few comments.] What we eat can affect how much acid is made by the plaque in our mouths. Who remembers the food groups? [Make list on board.] Eating a mix of foods from these groups for breakfast, lunch and dinner is the best way to keep your teeth and whole body in good shape. (Visit www.mypyramid.gov for more information.) Let's see how good you are at making up some healthy meals.

ACTIVITY #6 (if time allows): Divide the class into teams of four students. See which group can make a menu of three balanced meals first. Discuss the choices, and how nutritious foods benefit your teeth as well as your total health.

Eating a nutritious mix of foods is the best way to keep your teeth and body healthy.

Good job! But what about snacks, sweets and soda pop? [Get opinions.] Eating sweets all day or drinking lots of soda pop is not good for our bodies, and it can cause cavities, too. Who remembers what happens in our mouths after we eat? Yes, plaque and sugar mix to form acid. Then the acid attacks our teeth. The more often we eat snacks, the more acid attacks we have. But that doesn't mean that all snacks are bad for you. Sometimes growing children and teens need to eat between meals. If you are hungry and need a snack, choose nutritious foods like fruit, low-fat cheese, low-fat yogurt or raw vegetables. If you are thirsty, have a glass of water or low-fat milk. Save the sweets to eat and drink with your meals. A full meal produces lots of saliva in your mouth that helps wash away the acids from your teeth.

**If you have sweets, eat or drink them with your meals.
If you need a snack, choose nutritious foods.**

What about chewing gum? [Get opinions.] Chewing gum for about 20 minutes immediately after a meal or snack is okay as long as the gum is sugarless. In fact, sugar-free gum makes your mouth produce more saliva that can help rinse the acid off your teeth. When you are finished chewing, be sure to throw it away in a trash can.

Chewing sugarless gum increases saliva and helps wash out food and acid.

13. *Dental visits.* So far we have talked about three important ways you can care for your teeth — brushing, flossing and eating nutritious foods. There is one more very important thing we should all do to keep our teeth and gums healthy. Who can tell me what it is? Yes! Visit your dentist regularly. What does your dentist do? [Examines your teeth and mouth to see if they are healthy. Tells you how to take good care of your teeth. Fixes cavities and repairs teeth.] What else happens when you go to the dentist? [Get your teeth cleaned, have X-rays to see the insides of teeth to check for cavities and other problems, may get fluoride treatments.] Your dentist will tell you when your next visit should be.

Visit your dentist regularly.

Let's review what we know:

Summary: Kids in 4th, 5th and 6th grades can do a lot to help keep their teeth and gums in great shape! Brush twice a day with fluoride toothpaste, floss once a day, eat nutritious foods and limit snacks and visit your dentist regularly.



American Dental Association
www.ada.org

211 East Chicago Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60611-2678

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