

VOLUME 17 | ISSUE 2 | SUMMER 2021

GUEST ARTICLE: UNITED CONCORDIA DENTAL

UNITED CONCORDIA[®] DENTAL

WATCH YOUR MOUTH THIS SUMMER!

Don't take a vacation from good oral care this summer! To keep your smile healthy all season long, we're sharing a few quick tips—think drink lots of water, choose healthy snacks and stay on track with your oral hygiene in spite of a change in your family's schedule. Read below for additional information on adapting your habits to keep your mouth safe while enjoying the warmer weather!

Drink to Your Oral Health

On a hot summer day, one thing we all do is reach for a refreshing cold drink—and staying properly hydrated is one of your body's best defenses against tooth decay and gum disease. According to the American Dental Association, water is the best beverage for your oral health and overall wellness. When your mouth is dry, it creates an environment that helps to breed the bacteria that cause cavities and disease. With the popularity of bottled water, many people assume that all water is good for your mouth and gums. However, many bottled water brands contain pH levels significantly lower than pure water. Lower pH means higher acid content, which can harm the enamel of your teeth. Look for the pH level indicated on the label of bottled water before you drink it. And remember, the fluoridated water that most often comes from your tap is the best choice! Most other beverages like juice and energy, sports and soft drinks contain large amounts of sugar and acid, which can feed bacteria in the mouth. Limiting these drinks can help you win the battle against gum and tooth decay. Beverage labels often can be misleading with claims like "sugar free," "low or zero calorie" and "all natural"; these products can still have high acidity levels that put your mouth and teeth at risk.

When Life Gives You Lemons: As the official drink of summertime, lemonade is delicious but unfortunately its combination of sugar and citric acid is not so sweet for your teeth. To help protect your teeth when offered a glass of this sour-sweet concoction (or any sweet or acidic drink):

- **Swish after a sip:** Whether freshly squeezed or store bought, most lemonade has loads of sugar, which can cause cavities. After drinking lemonade, swish some water around in your mouth to help wash away some of the sugar left on the surface of your teeth. This also can rinse away some of the citric acid in the lemon juice, which can damage your enamel. Lemon juice has one of the lowest pH levels of all fruit juices at a range of 2.00-2.60. If the pH level in your mouth drops below 5.5, enamel can be eaten away.
- **Use a straw:** Typically when you take a drink, the liquid sloshes around in your mouth and surrounds your teeth. Using a straw can help move the liquid to the back of your mouth, limiting your teeth's exposure to sugar and citric acid.
- **Let the ice melt:** Chewing on something as hard as ice can damage your teeth and lead to painful chips, cracks and broken dental appliances. So, break the chewing habit and just say no to the crunch!

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When it comes to staining your teeth's enamel, coffee and tea are serious culprits. Most people are unwilling to give up the coffee or tea habit, so limiting how often you consume these beverages and rinsing your mouth with water after drinking can be helpful.

Snacks, Sunscreen and Schedule

Supercharge Your Snack Supply: With kids coming and going all summer, it's a great time to get your snacks on track by swapping out unhealthy foods for healthier ones. Keep your fridge stocked with cheeses, yogurts and fresh fruits and vegetables. These are nutritious foods that everyone can quickly grab on the go. If you love making salsa with tomatoes fresh from the garden, try whipping up some guacamole instead. Tomatoes are full of vitamins, but they're also high in acid. Avocados are one of Mother Nature's super foods, with low sugar and tons of vitamins and minerals.

Protect Your Lips: You wouldn't sunbathe without protecting your body with sunscreen, so don't skip your lips. They have a super-thin outer layer and few oil-producing glands, which means they can get dried out easily. Prolonged sun exposure increases your risk of skin cancer and premature aging, so it's very important to keep your lips protected and hydrated. According to the American Academy of Dermatology, lip balm or lipstick with 30 SPF is the best defense against skin cancer on your lips and a water-resistant formula is ideal for summer. Apply it throughout the day for maximum benefits. If your lips are extra dry and chapped, gently exfoliate them with a soft toothbrush.

Schedule Summer Oral Hygiene: Just because the kids aren't heading off to school every morning doesn't mean their oral hygiene routine can take a break too. With a hectic summer schedule, you'll probably need to remind everyone that they *still* need to brush their teeth after breakfast and before bed, as well as floss daily. Also, don't forget to keep up with summer checkups! If your gang sees the dentist in early summer rather than later, any necessary dental work can be taken care of before school starts again. And it will be less likely that a toothache or lost filling causes problems during summer vacation or outings. Keep disposable toothbrushes and toothpaste in the car. Your family's oral health doesn't have to suffer just because you're all having fun. Your effort will pay off when everyone gets a clean bill of health in the fall.

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