



## TIP SHEET Nutrition and Oral Health



In addition to proper brushing and regular dental visits, good nutrition is a critical element in children's oral health. These simple strategies can help your child to establish good nutrition habits that will strengthen his or her oral and overall health.

- **Avoid grazing.** Children (18 months and older) should have three meals and two snacks per day. Children who eat continually do not learn how to recognize hunger or the sense of being full.
- **Plan balanced meals.** For all meals, children should have a protein, a starch or carbohydrate, and a fruit or vegetable on their plate. Even if children do not always eat all of the presented foods, it is important to always offer all food categories. This helps children to learn about foods and get used to having them on their plates.
- **Serve meals at the table.** Children should eat meals at the table with their family members other or people. Eating with others allows children to learn about a variety of foods and can increase tolerance and willingness to try foods. Parents and siblings also model appropriate eating behaviors which can be emulated.
- **Avoid mealtime distractions.** Distractions include television, movies, computer games, books, toys and constant talking and singing that are not related to the food at the table. During meals, children should be attending to the food and learning about eating.
- **Encourage drinking from an open cup.** Children (12 months and older) should be encouraged to drink from an open cup. Bottles and sippy cups allow the liquid to be in contact with the teeth longer, promoting harmful cavities. You can reduce the risk of cavities by transitioning to water and avoiding sugary liquids. If a child relies on a bottle or sippy cup for calming, set parameters for access. Do not have the bottle or sippy cup available at all times, and if needed for bed time calming, brush teeth before going to sleep.
- **Provide fluoridated water.** Scientific studies have found that people living in communities with fluoridated water have fewer cavities than those living where the water is not fluoridated. To find out if your community's water is fluoridated, visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov). If you drink bottled water, check its contents for fluoride.
- **Avoid sugary and sticky foods.** Foods high in sugar such as fruit chew snacks, soda, rice milk, sugar coated cereal, peanut butter and jelly, granola bars, breakfast bars, popsicles and candy, can damage your child's teeth. Sugar fuels the naturally occurring plaque in the mouth to create acid, which in turn increases the risk of developing cavities. Foods that stick to teeth increase the amount of exposure to sugar and can be difficult to remove, even with brushing.
- **Avoid medicine that contains sugar.** Many children's medications have sugar added to increase the palatability. When possible, choose alternatives that are better for your child's oral health.

*Disclaimer: This information is provided for reference only. Consult your dentist before engaging in any procedures, practices, or treatments.*

These tips were compiled from a variety of sources. For more tip sheets, visit [www.fraser.org](http://www.fraser.org).