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Contact: Megan D. Smith  
Director of Communications  
[msmith@ohioafp.org](mailto:msmith@ohioafp.org)

## **Good Oral Health in Childhood Prevents Dental Problems in Adults**

(COLUMBUS, Ohio)—Taking good care of your mouth and teeth at the beginning of life can help prevent dental problems as you get older. It is important to take care of your teeth by brushing and flossing every day.

“In evaluating my patients, I take the opportunity at the 6 month well-child visit (in anticipation of the appearance of teeth), or the initial visit for an adult, to discuss good oral health. In children, I stress the importance of brushing and flossing as well as healthy eating habits,” said Suellywn Stewart, M.D., a family physician in Columbus, Ohio.

Taking good care of teeth should start before the first tooth ever comes in by wiping a baby’s gums with a soft, damp cloth after feedings to help prevent the buildup of bacteria. When teeth appear, start using a soft children’s toothbrush twice a day.

“I complete a dental assessment as the first teeth break through the gums. During this assessment, I look in the mouth for cuts, cavities, dental plaques and malformation of the teeth. I advise parents to start taking their children to the dentist at age 3 and then every six months for cleaning and examination,” said Stewart.

Once your child is preschool age and can tolerate brushing, start using a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste on the toothbrush. Young children tend to swallow most of the toothpaste and swallowing too much fluoride toothpaste can cause permanent stains on their teeth.

Poor dental treatment early in life may result in cavities, holes that are formed when germs in the mouth use the sugar in food to make acid that eats away at the teeth.

To avoid cavities in children and adults, choose a toothbrush with soft bristles. Make sure to brush all of your teeth, not just the front ones, and spend time on the teeth along the sides and in the back of your mouth.

“In adults, I enquire about the last time the patient visited a dentist and make a referral, if need, as soon as disease is discovered. It is also important to address good oral health because of the health consequences that can occur, like the loss of teeth, especially in patients with chronic illnesses,” stated Stewart.

Taking good care of our mouths and teeth will help us have pleasant breath, a nice smile and fewer cavities for the rest of our lives.

*The Ohio Academy of Family Physicians is a statewide professional association with more than 4,400 members, including practicing physicians, family medicine residents and medical students. The scope of family medicine encompasses all ages, both sexes and every disease entity. Family physicians provide comprehensive, continuing care to all members of the family.*



## FACT SHEET

Date: Jan. 14, 2009

Contact: Megan D. Smith  
Director of Communications  
msmith@ohioafp.org

### **Good Oral Health in Childhood Prevents Dental Problems in Adults**

#### **How You Can Keep Your Teeth Healthy**

- Brush at least twice a day—after breakfast and before bedtime. If you can, brush after lunch or after snacks.
- Brush all of your teeth, not just the front ones. Spend some time on the teeth along the sides and in the back. Brush away from your gums.
- Take your time while brushing. Spend at least three minutes each time you brush. If you have trouble keeping track of the time, use a timer or play a recording of a song you like to help pass the time.
- Be sure your toothbrush has soft bristles (the package will tell you if they are soft). Replace your toothbrush every three months.
- Learn how to floss your teeth. Slip the dental floss between each tooth and up along the gum line. The floss gets rid of food that is hidden where your toothbrush cannot get it, no matter how well you brush.
- Eat lots of fruits and vegetables and drink water to help keep your teeth healthy.
- Do not smoke or chew tobacco.
- Wear the right protective headgear while playing contact sports.
- Visit the dentist twice a year. Besides checking for signs of cavities or gum disease, the dentist will help keep your teeth extra clean, and help you learn the best way to brush and floss.

*Source: [www.familydoctor.org](http://www.familydoctor.org)*