



# Brush Up on Oral Health

## January 2018

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## Did You Know?

- **Up to 15 in 100 adults report fear of dental visits.**
- **Nearly 1 in 4 children are afraid of dental visits.**
- **People who fear dental visits are at higher risk of oral diseases than those who do not.**



## Fear of Dental Visits

Some people are afraid of dental visits and avoid them. Parents who are fearful may avoid taking their children to dental visits. This can be a big problem, especially if the parent or child has an oral disease, such as tooth decay or gum disease. Oral diseases do not go away without treatment and get worse without proper care.

This issue of *Brush Up on Oral Health* describes reasons some parents may fear dental visits and avoid seeking care. It includes tips on ways parents can overcome their fears. The issue also offers a recipe for a healthy snack to make in the Head Start classroom or at home.

## Common Reasons Parents Fear Dental Visits

Understanding why parents fear dental visits is important for helping them address their fear. People may feel a natural urge to protect their mouth and may be uneasy with someone working in their mouth. Also, being tipped back or lying down in a dental chair may make people feel helpless. Other common reasons include bad childhood memories of dental visits, concern that treatment maybe painful, fear of sharp dental instruments, and fear of strange noises and smells in the dental office.

## Tips for Helping Parents Get Over Fear of Dental Visits

- **Admit there is a problem.** Many people make excuses about why they avoid dental visits. Often, they say they do not like their dentist, are too busy, or cannot afford oral health care. Helping parents be truthful about their fear of dental visits can be the first step toward overcoming it.

- **Find the right dental team.** Encourage parents to ask family members and friends who were afraid of dental visits to recommend a dental team that has helped them overcome their fear. Help parents find a dental office or clinic that knows how to reduce anxiety about dental visits.
- **Bring someone along.** Recommend that parents bring a trusted family member or friend who is not afraid of dental visits to sit with them during their appointment.
- **Talk with the dental team.** Urge parents to talk to the dental team about their fears. The dental team can help make parents feel comfortable and ease their fears.
- **Ask the dental team for explanations.** Explain to parents that they can ask the dental team to describe things to them in advance. Parents can also ask the dental team to let the parent know what they are doing along the way as well as what to expect next. Parents can offer the dental team suggestions about ways to make the visit more comfortable for the parent.
- **Make a plan to communicate during care.** Encourage parents to talk to the dental team before treatment begins and agree on a signal that shows that the parent is uncomfortable or needs a break.
- **Block out noise.** Parents can wear earplugs or noise-cancelling headphones to block sounds from the dental equipment and instruments. Parents can use earbuds to listen to music on their phone or other device to take their mind off the dental procedure.
- **Use relaxation techniques.** Work with parents to practice and use deep breathing, muscle relaxation, or meditation during their visit. Encourage them to relax their mind and imagine a peaceful place.
- **Consider options for comfort.** Help parents schedule visits at a time when they are not stressed or rushed. Parents can bring nasal strips if they are worried that they will have trouble breathing. They can also ask to have numbing cream put on their gums before getting a shot. Nitrous oxide (laughing gas) or other options can also be used to reduce stress. If parents find that the position of the dental chair is uncomfortable, encourage them to ask the dental team to adjust it.



## Cook's Corner: Teddy Bear Toast

Here's a delicious healthy snack that staff and children can make in a Head Start classroom or at home with their families.

### Ingredients

- 2 slices whole wheat bread
- 2 tablespoons peanut butter
- ½ banana sliced into 6 pieces
- 6 blueberries



## Directions

1. Toast the bread, and spread the peanut butter on the bread.
2. Place 2 banana pieces on the top corners of each toast slice to make the ears.
3. Place 1 banana piece in the center of the bottom half of each toast slice to make the nose.
4. Place the blueberries on the toast slices to finish the nose and make the eyes above the nose.

## Makes 2 servings

**Safety tip:** An adult should slice the ingredients.

## Contact Us

The National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness welcomes your feedback on this issue, as well as your suggestions for topics for future issues. Please forward your comments to [health@ecetta.info](mailto:health@ecetta.info) or call 866-763-6481.

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This issue was developed with funds from grant #90HC0013 for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start, Office of Child Care, and Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau by the National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness. This resource may be duplicated for noncommercial uses without permission.

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*School readiness begins with health!*



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