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## Dental Health

### School Food and Beverage Sales

Health problems like cavities and gum disease can have a great impact on students:

- ✓ Tooth decay, the most common disorder of childhood, can lead to pain, lack of sleep, poor self-esteem and difficulty chewing nutritious foods
- ✓ Learning can be affected when children miss school days or can't focus in class due to these problems
- ✓ Missing or sore, decayed teeth can make it difficult to talk clearly

#### WHAT CAUSES TOOTH DECAY AND GUM DISEASE?

Plaque – the soft, sticky deposit that grows on teeth – causes cavities and gum disease. Plaque is primarily made of bacteria that live in the mouth and feed on sugars and starches left after eating and drinking.

When bacteria digest these materials, they produce acid that weakens the tooth surface and leads to decay. These “acid attacks” last about 20 minutes.

Between meals and snacks, children's saliva helps repair the damage caused by acid attacks. However, each sip or bite of sugary or starchy item starts the acid attack all over again. Saliva can't keep up with the damage if we “graze” or sip frequently, or if sugary/starchy foods are stuck to our teeth, providing a continuous food source for bacteria.

Some food and beverage choices at school can increase and prolong acid attacks on students' teeth, putting them at greater risk for tooth decay. Schools can minimize acid attacks in a number of ways:

- ✓ Decrease the frequency of eating and sipping. Healthy snacks and beverages provide children with the energy and nutrients they need to learn and grow however, grazing and sipping throughout the day will cause too many acid attacks. Having snacks and beverages only at designated times helps protect students' teeth. To promote healthy teeth, only plain water should be allowed in classrooms, except at designated meal times.
- ✓ For routine snack food sales, choose food items that don't cling to teeth, such as fresh fruit, vegetables, cheese, nuts or popcorn. Retentive carbohydrate foods like dried fruits (fruit leather, raisins), granola bars, crackers, cereals, tortillas, potato/corn/apple chips and some candies (like fruit roll-ups), cling to tooth surfaces and remain in the mouth longer. To promote dental health, schools can limit how frequently they sell sticky foods. Nutritious sticky foods (like fruit leather), could be incorporated into lunch menus occasionally.



Dental health professionals consider fruit leather and dried fruit to be among the most retentive foods within Canada's Food Guide. They are nutritious but, when you can't brush after eating them, they put teeth at risk.

- ✓ Encourage students to clear their mouths' between snack/meal times. Swishing with water and other techniques can help clean students' mouths when they can't brush. Chewing sugar-free gum (made with xylitol) is also helpful, but not always practical in a school setting. Foods such as nuts and hard cheese are good to end a snack or meal when brushing isn't possible. They help clear the mouth of trace carbohydrates and may help reset the mouth's pH to slow down plaque growth.
- ✓ Sell beverages that are not acidic. Acids in most soft drinks and other beverages work like plaque to dissolve tooth enamel, especially when sipped over a period of time. Although diet drinks and flavoured waters don't contain sugar, most contain acids. Fruit juices also contain some natural acids. Schools can promote dental health by encouraging students to drink plain water instead of acidic drinks between meal and snack times.
- ✓ Encourage a supportive attitude towards dental health throughout your school environment. Contact your Public Health Unit's dental staff for lesson plans and ideas to promote tooth health amongst your staff, students and parents.

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

- ✓ British Columbia Dental Hygienists' Association  
[www.bcdha.bc.ca](http://www.bcdha.bc.ca)
- ✓ Canadian Dental Association:  
[www.cda-adc.ca](http://www.cda-adc.ca)
- ✓ Dial-a-Dietitian at 604.732.9191 (toll free in BC at 1.800.667.3438)  
[www.dialadietitian.org](http://www.dialadietitian.org)
- ✓ Guidelines for Food and Beverage Sales in BC Schools (2007, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health)  
[www.bced.gov.bc.ca/health/guidelines\\_sales07.pdf](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/health/guidelines_sales07.pdf)