

Children Need to Brush Longer and More Often

Make Brushing Fun to Improve Overall Oral Health

Poor brushing and not enough brushing are the biggest obstacles to children having excellent oral health and are the ones that cause caregivers the greatest concern.

That's one of the key findings from a survey of American children's oral health, conducted in 2009 on behalf of Delta Dental Plans Association, the nation's leading dental benefits provider. Delta Dental commissioned the survey of primary caregivers to gain greater knowledge about the state of children's oral health.

While nearly three in five Americans (58 percent) report that their children's overall oral health is excellent, more than a third of the survey respondents (36 percent) admit their children brush their teeth less than once a day. They recognize the frequency as "not enough," despite the fact that nearly all those surveyed (95 percent) with children three to six years old say they supervise or assist with brushing.

Among those who rate their children's oral health as less than excellent, 45 percent say their children brush their teeth for a minute or less, though dentists recommend spending two minutes or more on each brushing. And, while the American Association of Pediatric Dentists recommends daily flossing, a quarter of the survey respondents say their children never floss. Only 7 percent report their children floss daily.

Another 20 percent of survey respondents say the biggest obstacle is a poor diet of not enough fruits and vegetables and too many sweets. Diet issues are compounded by sugary treats used as rewards. Among those who give food treats to their children who are four years or older, three-quarters give sugary foods as a reward. Also, more than half of Americans (55%) say their children consume soft drinks at least once a week. One in ten Americans admits that their children consume soft drinks every day.



Making Brushing Fun

Getting children to brush regularly, and correctly, can be a real challenge. Here are some easy ideas to encourage brushing:

- **Trade places:** Tired of prying your way in whenever it's time to brush those little teeth? Why not reverse roles and let the child brush your teeth? It's fun for them and shows them the right way to brush. Just remember, do not share a toothbrush. According to the American Dental Association, sharing a toothbrush may result in an exchange of microorganisms and an increased risk of infections.
- **Take Turns:** Set a timer and have the child brush his or her teeth for 30 seconds. Then you brush your child's teeth for 30 seconds. Repeat this at least twice.
- **Call in reinforcements:** If children stubbornly neglect to brush or floss, maybe it's time to change the messenger. Call the dental office before the next checkup and ask for their help. The same motivational message might be heeded if it comes from a third party, especially the hygienist or the dentist.

"Americans say they understand that proper brushing technique is critical to children's oral health," said Jed J. Jacobson, DDS, MS, MPH, chief science officer and senior V.P. of Delta Dental Plans Association. "But there's clearly a need for more education, more frequently, to teach practices that will ensure lifelong oral health. And, since people overwhelmingly prefer the dentist as their primary information source, dental benefits that encourage visits to the dentist are crucial."

Northeast Delta Dental

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