



AUSTRALIAN DENTAL ASSOCIATION INC.

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NATIONAL ORAL HEALTH DAY – ORAL HEALTH FOR CHILDREN

As part of Dental Health Week 2005 (1-7 August), the theme for this year's National Oral Health Day is 'Oral Health for Children'. Key issues to be explored during National Oral Health Day include dental health and pregnancy, drinks and dental decay, and decay and sugar.

Held on 1 August, National Oral Health Day is sponsored by the Australian Dental Association (ADA) and is part of the ADA's Dental Health Week.

Pregnant women

Like the general population, it is important that pregnant women maintain good oral health. This includes brushing with fluoride toothpaste after meals, flossing and visiting the dentist regularly.

Hormone changes during pregnancy can lead to an increase in the amount of plaque on a woman's teeth. If not treated, this can lead to gingivitis. This can then develop into severe forms of gum disease such as periodontal disease, which is a chronic bacterial infection of the gum tissue. It is important this is treated immediately as gum disease has been linked to premature birth and low birth-weight in babies.

Mothers-to-be can affect the development of their babies' tooth structure. Babies begin to develop their teeth and bones in the fourth month of pregnancy.

The calcium and phosphorous they need to do this comes from what the mother eats, and if necessary, from their bones. A developing baby will need even more of these minerals during the third trimester of the pregnancy.

The best way to obtain these minerals is through the intake of dairy products. If a woman is having difficulty consuming the recommended amount, her doctor, in consultation with her dentist, may recommend a calcium supplement. The recommended daily intake of calcium for pregnant women is 1,100 mg during pregnancy and 1,200 mg while breastfeeding.

Drinks and dental decay

Most people are aware that soft drinks contain significant amounts of sugar. For example, a 600ml

bottle of soft drink can contain up to 13 teaspoons of sugar.

It is less well known that soft drinks (even the 'diet' or 'sugar-free' soft drinks) and sport drinks also contain acid which can damage teeth.

Acids can gradually erode enamel from teeth leading to loss of the tooth's natural shape, or premature exposure of the dentine, which can make a tooth sensitive – especially when exposed to heat and cold.

Bottled water is another drink that has the potential to impact on oral health. While bottled water is a better alternative than juice, cordial, sports drinks and fizzy drinks, increased consumption of bottled water, particularly by children, means people may be consuming less fluoridated tap water. Cavities in teeth might become more common if fluoridated water is not consumed.

Decay and sugar

Snacks, particularly those high in sugar, feed the destructive bacteria in the mouth, which in turn puts acid on teeth. Each time food containing sugar or starch is eaten, bacteria are immediately activated to pump out acid which attack teeth for at least 20 minutes.

The ADA recommends children only eat these sugary snacks occasionally. When consumed they should be eaten close to meal times. It is preferable they are not eaten just before bedtime and should not be consumed after children clean their teeth before bed.

The ADA also recommends that when eating sugary snacks, children should have frequent sips of water to wash away as much of the sugary food and acids as possible. This also ensures that the mouth is adequately moist, as a dry mouth is less protected from bacteria and acids.

More information

For more information about National Oral Health Day and Dental Health Week see forthcoming media releases or visit the ADA's website www.ada.org.au



Dental Health Week 2005

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