

How would you answer this question?

*“What is the most common childhood chronic disease in the United States?”*

If you replied asthma, allergies, obesity or diabetes, you would be wrong!! Actually the most common chronic childhood disease is *tooth decay*.

According to studies, tooth decay is *five times* more common than asthma and *four times* more common than childhood obesity. The CDC (Centers for Disease Control) reports that nearly one out of every five children in the United States has untreated cavities.

Daily cleaning and care of teeth, gums and tongue has many benefits. Good oral hygiene controls bacteria that can cause tooth decay and bleeding gums.

***Good oral hygiene habits must begin in a child's life.*** In 2007 a CDC study reported that the number of cavities in children between the ages of two and five had sadly *increased by 15%*.

Close attention must be paid to developing teeth at every stage of a child's life.

**Infancy:** Bottle-fed babies are prone to tooth decay if they are fed sweet liquids from their bottles or given milk at bedtime. ***AVOID putting baby to bed with a bottle.*** Wash an infant's teeth and gums with a clean, moist washcloth and eventually move to a soft infant toothbrush to brush a toddler's emerging teeth. Check on the fluoride content of your drinking water a fluoride can help keep your baby's teeth healthy. Your child should have his/her first dental check up by the first birthday!

**Toddler/Preschooler:** Teach young children to brush properly with a fluoride toothpaste though most young children will need help for quite some time to get the job done well! Introduce them to dental floss! Take young children to the dentist early for regular check-ups and offer tooth-friendly foods that will strengthen their teeth. Healthy foods like celery, carrots and apples clear away food and massage gums. Limiting sugary snacks and drinks at this will be a foundation for good choices later on. Instill good dental habits early!!

**School Aged Children:** A more confident young person can begin every morning with a good oral hygiene routine. A good day/night dental routine, in addition to regular check-ups and good nutrition can help improve self-esteem and overall good health. Talk with your dentist about sealants and make sure your young athlete wears a mouth guard when playing his favorite sport. Change out toothbrushes every two to three months or after an illness.

**Teen Years and beyond:** Hopefully by now, your teen has 'owned' her own dental health routine based on the good habits you instilled years ago. Provide your teen with good snacks and limit the amount of soda pop in your home. You wouldn't let you teen eat 12 teaspoons of sugar directly out of the sugar bowl so carefully consider your child's intake of pop! Continue regular dental visits, make sure mouth guards are used faithfully during sports and discourage the use of tobacco in any form; especially chew.

Remember, also, that poor oral health care can increase chances of developing heart disease.

Teeth were meant to last a lifetime! Just remember ***2x2: Twice a day for two minutes!*** With proper care, a balanced diet and regular dental visits, teeth can remain healthy and strong!