

NEWS RELEASE

School lunch can pack a sugar punch

Delta Dental presents its list of the top five best back-to-school oral health practices

DENVER (September 19, 2012) – It may seem like a mindless matter, but packing an apple instead of a sugary snack in a child’s lunch this fall can help improve oral health and educational performance. So Delta Dental of Colorado reminds parents to make good decisions when packing a child’s school lunch. After all, children eat more than 20 percent of their meals at school during the academic year.

“Kids should be focused on learning, not on being hungry or feeling tired and sluggish all afternoon,” said Dr. Michael Makoto Okuji, DDS, dental director for Delta Dental of Colorado. “Try to limit high sugar drinks and snacks, which are bad for the teeth as well as the rest of the body.”

The fact that children in Colorado (especially those from lower income families) suffer from poor nutritional habits is no real surprise. A report from the USDA Economic Research Service claimed that the average child under the age of 12 consumes 49 pounds of sugar per year.

Overconsumption of sugar harms a child’s oral and overall health. Snacks like cookies, candy and chewy fruit snacks mix with bacteria in the sticky plaque that constantly forms on teeth to generate acid, which can wear away enamel and cause tooth decay. While sweets may provide a temporary jolt for kids, that sugar rush soon turns into a crash and kids are left feeling lethargic. That is not the kind of mental state to help kids prepare for an afternoon of classes.

Instead, Delta Dental of Colorado recommends these top five oral health best practices:

- After breakfast, before leaving for school, make sure your child brushes well with a fluoridated toothpaste. Brushing immediately following a meal helps clean teeth and eliminates halitosis (bad breath).
- Fill a child’s lunch box with healthy food and snacks such as lean meats, whole grain breads, low-fat yogurt or cheeses, apples, bite-size carrots and baked chips or whole-grain crackers. Besides being packed with nutrients, certain fruits and veggies can even help clean the teeth and gums. Make treats a treat. Serve sugary sticky snacks like cookies, cake and brownies and candy only in moderation. Room parents should discuss bringing in healthy snacks along with sugary treats for birthdays and other classroom parties.
- If a child chews gum and the school allows it, chewing sugar-free gum for a few minutes in between lunch and afternoon classes can help stimulate saliva to buffer the acid and help dislodge food particles from the mouth. Gum containing the natural sweetener, Xylitol, is a particularly good option since studies have shown that consistent exposure to Xylitol can reduce cavity-causing bacteria in the mouth.
- If a child has braces, have them brush or rinse well with water after lunch. If a child wears a removable retainer, they should thoroughly clean it after each meal and rinse their mouth.
- Before the school year starts, schedule a dental visit to make sure there are no problems to distract a child during the school year. Ask the dentist about sealants as a way to protect children’s teeth from cavities. Sealants – a thin coating of bonding material applied over the chewing surface of molar teeth – act as a barrier to cavity-causing bacteria.

For more information about establishing good oral health habits for a lifetime of healthy smiles, visit www.MonthlyMouthfulCO.com or “like” Delta Dental of Colorado on Facebook at www.facebook.com/DeltaDentalCO.

About Delta Dental of Colorado

Delta Dental of Colorado is the largest and most experienced provider of dental benefits in the state. As a not-for-profit, Delta Dental of Colorado invests in oral health projects through the Delta Dental of Colorado Foundation that focus on access to care, prevention, education and research. The Colorado company is a member of the Delta Dental Plans Association, a national organization of not-for-profit Delta Dental plans. The national association is the largest dental benefits carrier in the nation providing coverage to more than 56 million people in nearly 95,700 employer groups.