



# Brush Up on Oral Health

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## Oral Health and School Readiness

School readiness begins with health because a child must be healthy to be ready to learn. School readiness depends on positive physical, social and emotional, learning, language, and cognitive development. Oral health impacts each of these areas and plays an important role in a child's school readiness.

This issue of *Brush Up on Oral Health* describes the impact of oral health on a child's ability to learn. It includes strategies and resources Head Start staff can use to promote oral health among parents and in the classroom. A recipe for a healthy snack that can be made in the Head Start classroom or at home is also included.

### Did You Know?

- Tooth decay is the most common chronic disease of childhood. It affects more than one in four children ages 2 to 5.
- Tooth decay is 100 percent preventable.



## The Impact of Oral Health on School Readiness

The health of a child's mouth can affect all aspects of a child's life. Children with poor oral health may:

- Have a hard time concentrating and learning because they are in pain
- Miss more school days
- Develop other serious health conditions, such as infections
- Stop smiling, cover their mouth with their hands when they speak, or withdraw from family, friends, and teachers if others comment on the appearance of their teeth

The good news is that tooth decay can be prevented. Ingredients of good oral health include brushing with fluoride toothpaste twice a day and visiting the dental office regularly. Eating healthy meals and snacks and drinking water containing fluoride are also important for good oral health.

## Resources Head Start Staff Can Use to Promote Oral Health

The National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness provides a variety of resources that can be used to promote oral health among parents and in the classroom:

- [Checklist for Child Care Staff: Best Practices for Good Oral Health](#) is a checklist with items that Head Start and child care program staff can check to show what they are doing to promote good oral health for infants, toddlers, and young children. Items not checked can serve as goals to help staff work toward improving their practices related to foods and drinks and oral hygiene. The checklist is divided into three main categories: infants from birth to age 1, toddlers ages 1–3, and young children ages 3–5. Within each category, items to check are listed in two sub-categories: foods and drinks and oral hygiene. The checklist is also available in [Spanish \(español\)](#).
- [Healthy Children Are Ready to Learn](#) offers information that connects school readiness to health and healthy development. This handout is also available in [Spanish \(español\)](#).
- [Healthy Habits for Happy Smiles](#) is a series of handouts for pregnant women and parents that provide simple tips on oral health issues. Topics include teething pain, toothbrushing, healthy drinks and snacks, fluoride, oral injuries, and dental visits. All handouts are available in [Spanish \(español\)](#).
- [Oral Health: Tips for Health Managers](#) identifies strategies oral health managers and other staff can use to promote good oral health habits in pregnant women and children enrolled in Head Start. This handout is also available in [Spanish \(español\)](#).
- [Steps for Toothbrushing at the Table: Growing Healthy Smiles in Early Care and Education Programs](#) is a video that provides Head Start and child care staff with information about how children can brush their teeth as a group at the table. The video shows a Head Start teacher modeling brushing at the table, while the children also brush with her guidance. Instructions for how to prepare the area, clean up after brushing, and safely store toothbrushes are included. The video also shows a dentist explaining how toothbrushing with fluoride toothpaste can help prevent tooth decay. Captions written in [Spanish \(español\)](#) are included.



The resources listed above and other related material are available on the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center's [oral health webpage](#). The webpage offers a variety of resources to help staff provide oral health education to families. Topics include dental visits, fluoride, nutrition, oral health care, oral hygiene, and safety and emergency first aid. Many of the resources are also available in [Spanish \(español\)](#).

## Cook's Corner: Pumpkin Hummus

Here is a delicious and healthy snack that children can make in a Head Start classroom or at home with their families.

### Ingredients

- 2 15-ounce cans drained chickpeas (garbanzo beans)
- 1 15-ounce can pumpkin
- 2 tablespoons tahini
- 2 cloves garlic, peeled
- 1 ½ tablespoon lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- ¼ cup olive oil
- ¼ teaspoon paprika
- 2 cups plain or low-fat yogurt
- 1 cucumber, cut in half, sliced lengthwise and peeled to make stripes



### Directions

1. Combine all ingredients, except the cucumber, in a blender or food processor and blend until smooth.
2. Add more olive oil if the mixture is thick.
3. Put the hummus on a plate or in a shallow bowl and use the back of a spoon to form a pumpkin shape.
4. Add cucumber to make pumpkin stem.
5. Serve with vegetable sticks or whole wheat crackers.

### Makes 8 servings

**Safety tip:** An adult should slice ingredients and supervise use of the blender or food processor.

## Contact Us

The National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness welcomes your feedback on this issue, as well as your suggestions for topics for future issues. Please forward your comments to [health@ecetta.info](mailto:health@ecetta.info) or call 866-763-6481.

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This issue was developed with funds from cooperative agreement #90HC0013 for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start, Office of Child Care, and Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau, by the National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness. This resource may be duplicated for noncommercial uses without permission. This publication is in the public domain, and no copyright can be claimed by persons or organizations.

*School readiness begins with health!*



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