Taking Care of Your Teeth

You've got a lot going on. Homework, sports, friends, and maybe a video game now and then. Who has time to take care of their teeth? You do! It only takes a few minutes each day, and it's time well spent.

From Baby Teeth to Permanent Teeth
By the time you turn 13, most of your baby teeth will have fallen out and been replaced by your permanent teeth. It's important to take care of your teeth because you'll have them for the rest of your life.

Fighting Cavities
When you eat, the sugar in food causes a sticky film called plaque to form on your teeth. Plaque can attack your teeth and cause cavities. Most of us like foods with lots of sugar — like candy, cake, cookies, ice cream and soda. That's why it's important to brush your teeth after eating.

Keep Smiling — Even with Braces
You will want your teeth to look good and to have a good bite. If your permanent teeth come in crooked or crammed too tightly together, you may want to talk to an orthodontist — a dentist who is an expert in making teeth straight, using braces. Braces work by gently pushing on your teeth to make them straight. They have come a long way from the “train track” look of years ago. Today, many people have braces that attach to the backs of the teeth or that come in clear or colored varieties.
Do you know how to take care of your teeth?
Take this short quiz to find out.

How often should you brush your teeth?

- a. Twice a week
- b. Once a day
- c. At least twice a day – after breakfast and just before bed

How long should you brush?

- a. 2-3 minutes
- b. 5 minutes
- c. 10 minutes

How often should you get a new toothbrush?

- a. Every month
- b. Every 3 months
- c. Every 6 months

Answers: 1c, 2a, 3b

If you get sick, it's a good idea to get a new toothbrush when you feel better because the germs left on your old brush could make you sick again.

More Tips for Healthy Teeth

**Flossing** — Did you know that if you don't floss, you miss cleaning up to one-third of each tooth? Flossing gets rid of food stuck between your teeth that can cause cavities. If you're not sure how to floss, ask your dentist or dental hygienist.

**Mouth guards** — For sports like basketball, hockey or bike riding, it's a good idea to wear a mouth guard. It's a soft piece of plastic that fits over your teeth and protects them from injury — just like a helmet protects your head.

**Toothaches** — If you get a toothache or break or lose a permanent tooth, see your dentist as soon as possible.