

# Module 1: “Be Smart about Your Smile!”

15 -30 minutes

## Key Message

Taking proper care of your teeth enhances your total health and gives you a more attractive appearance.

## Student goals

Upon completing this module students should be aware that good oral health habits:

- Help keep their whole body healthy and fit.
- Can help them do their best at school and in sports (because they will feel better, both physically and psychologically).
- Have cosmetic benefits, including a nicer looking smile, fresh breath, and social confidence.

## Module Topics (with discussion points and questions)

1. *Personal appearance.* Let's make a list of things that help a person be more attractive. I don't mean good looking or popular; I'm looking for ideas about what makes people of any age attractive. [List on chalkboard: Personality attributes like friendliness, intelligence, confidence; Physical attributes like their smile, cleanliness, being physically fit, having good health.]
2. *The benefits of a nice smile.* Since we are going to be talking about teeth and good oral health in a few minutes, let's talk a little more about having an attractive smile. What does it take to get and keep a nice smile? [Keep teeth clean by brushing and flossing, visit your dentist, eat nutritious foods, don't smoke.] Yes, all those things affect your smile, your teeth, your health and your appearance.

**Good oral health habits play a big part in having a nice smile, speaking well, being able to eat properly and having confidence.**

3. *What happens if teeth are not cared for?* So taking care of your teeth sounds like a smart idea. What happens to your teeth if you don't take care of them? [Bad breath, stains, cavities, swollen gums, maybe tooth loss.]
4. *What a cavity is.* None of those things sound very appealing. Let's talk about cavities and what causes them. What is a cavity? [A little hole in your tooth.] Right. A cavity is another name for tooth decay. What happens when something decays? [Gets rotten, falls apart, loses strength.] It's no different with your teeth. When your teeth decay, they lose their strength. The decay can spread throughout your tooth.

**A cavity is a small hole in a tooth,  
also known as tooth decay.**

5. *What plaque is.* Does anyone remember what causes cavities? [You may get a variety of answers, but they may not include plaque.] Those are all interesting answers, but there is one thing that plays a big part in causing decay, or cavities, in your teeth. It is called “plaque.” Sound familiar? If you don’t brush your teeth before going to bed at night, how does your mouth feel when you wake up in the morning? [Tastes bad, smells bad, teeth feel sticky.] That is because plaque has been forming in your mouth all night. Plaque is a sticky, clear film that is forming on your teeth 24 hours a day.

**Plaque is a sticky, clear film that is constantly  
forming on your teeth.**

6. *How plaque contributes to decay.* When you eat or drink foods containing sugars and starches, the bacteria (germs) in plaque produce acids that attack tooth enamel. The stickiness of the plaque keeps the harmful acids against the teeth. After many such attacks, the tooth enamel — the hard outer layer of each tooth — breaks down and a cavity forms. Each acid attack can last as long as 20 minutes, making cavities bigger and bigger. So, do any of you think you have plaque on your teeth right now?
7. *Plaque and gum disease.* If the plaque is not removed effectively with daily brushing and cleaning between teeth with floss, it eventually hardens into *calculus* or *tartar*. Tartar must be removed, because it makes your teeth more difficult to clean. If tartar is not removed, it can lead to gingivitis, an early form of gum disease in which your gums become irritated and can bleed easily. [*Gingiva* = gums; *-itis* = inflammation] That’s why it is important to brush your teeth twice a day, floss daily and have your teeth professionally cleaned at the dental office.

**The sugars in food and germs in plaque mix together  
to make acid. The acids in your mouth attack your teeth  
and can make cavities. Repeated acid attacks make  
cavities grow bigger.**

**Twice-daily brushing and once-daily flossing help remove  
bits of food and plaque from the mouth and are *essential*  
in preventing both tooth decay and gum disease.**

7. *Repairing cavities.* What happens when someone gets a cavity in their tooth? Does it heal itself? [No. You have to go to the dentist to get it repaired.] That’s right. Only your dentist can repair a cavity, by removing the decay and putting a special filling material in the hole.

**Cavities cannot go away by themselves.  
They must be treated by a dentist.**

8. *Three ways to keep teeth their best.* Let's talk about the three main ways we can keep those "pearly whites" in smiling condition: proper brushing and flossing, eating nutritious foods, and regular dental visits.
9. *Proper brushing.* Let's start with brushing, and list all the good things that happen when we brush our teeth. [Brushing cleans food and plaque off teeth, fights acid, makes your breath smell good, makes your mouth taste good.] Good answers. How often should you brush your teeth? [Twice a day.] There is an important ingredient in most toothpaste that helps your teeth. Does anyone know what it is? [Fluoride.] What does fluoride do? [Fluoride prevents cavities by strengthening and protecting the tooth enamel from acid.]

**Brush twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste.  
Fluoride toothpaste helps prevent cavities by  
protecting tooth enamel.**

Move the brush back and forth gently in short strokes. Brush the top, front, and back sides of each tooth. If you are wearing braces, you should ask your general dentist or orthodontist about the best way to brush and keep your teeth clean.

You should also *gently* brush your tongue. Really! Your tongue has lots of germs on it that can cause your breath to smell bad. And by the way, toothbrushes don't last forever. If your toothbrush looks like this (hold up *Old and New Toothbrushes*), with bent or broken bristles, it's time to toss it and get a new one! You should use a toothbrush that is comfortable to hold and easily reaches all tooth surfaces.

**ACTIVITY #1:** Here is a picture of one way to brush your teeth. It says...  
(Show *How to Brush* and read instructions. Ask for questions and comments.)

**Move the brush back and forth gently in short strokes.  
Brush the top, front and back sides of each tooth.  
Brush your tongue gently, too.**

**Use a toothbrush that easily reaches all tooth surfaces  
and is comfortable to hold.**

10. *Flossing.* How many of you floss your teeth each day? Flossing cleans between your teeth, which is just as important as brushing them. There are lots of types of floss you can choose from — waxed, unwaxed, flavored, string or flat tape. Flossing is not as easy to do as brushing, so if you don't remember how, ask your dentist, then practice.

You should floss once a day. Why is flossing important? [Helps remove bits of food and plaque from between teeth, where your toothbrush can't reach. Helps keep your gums healthy.] Your permanent teeth are much closer together than your baby teeth were, and flossing those choppers is essential for healthy teeth and gums — and fresh breath, too! But floss gently. It doesn't take a lot of muscle to remove the plaque and debris from between your teeth — just determination.

### Floss your teeth gently, once a day.

**ACTIVITY #2:** Show floss and explain the technique used in *How to Floss*.

11. *Good nutrition.* How does what we eat and drink affect our teeth? [Get a few comments.] What we eat and drink, and how often, affect how much acid is made by the plaque in our mouths.

### What we eat and drink, and how often, affect how much acid is produced in our mouths.

Who remembers the food groups? [List on board.] Eating a mix of foods from these groups for breakfast, lunch and dinner is the best way to keep your teeth and whole body in good shape. You know how important it is to eat right when you are in sports or dance. Well, your teeth are just as affected by what you put in your mouth. Did you know that Olympic athletes have their own dentist? That's because athletes cannot reach peak performance if their mouths are sore or if their teeth ache. Eating a nutritious mix of foods also helps you stay at your proper weight, helps keep your skin clear and makes your hair shiny! (Visit [www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov) for more information.) So let's see how good you are at making up some healthy meals.

**ACTIVITY #3:** Divide the class into teams of four students. See which can be the first group to make up a menu of three balanced meals and two healthy snacks. Discuss the choices, and how nutritious foods benefit your teeth as well as your total health.

### Eating a nutritious mix of foods from the food groups is the best way to keep your teeth and body healthy.

Those are very creative meal ideas! But what about sweets? Do you have to give up ALL sweets to have a healthy body and teeth? [Get opinions.] Munching on snacks all day and drinking lots of soda pop is not good for your body. It can cause an unhealthy

weight gain and cavities, too! Who remembers what happens in our mouths after we eat? Yes, plaque and sugar mix to form acid. Then the acid attacks our teeth. The more often we eat snacks, the more acid attacks we have. Don't eat too many sweets or drink a lot of soda pop. But if you have sweets, eat or drink them with your meals, because your saliva helps wash the acid off your teeth. If you need a snack between meals, choose nutritious foods like fruit, low-fat cheese, low-fat yogurt, or raw vegetables. If you are thirsty, have a glass of water or low-fat milk.

**If you want sweets, eat or drink them with your meals.  
If you snack, eat nutritious foods.**

What about chewing gum? [Get opinions.] Chewing gum for about 20 minutes immediately after a meal or snack is okay as long as the gum is sugarless. In fact, sugar-free gum makes your mouth produce more saliva, which helps rinse the acid off your teeth to prevent tooth decay.

**Chewing sugarless gum increases saliva and  
helps wash out food and acid.**

12. *Dental visits.* So far we have talked about three important ways you can care for your teeth — brushing, flossing and eating nutritious foods. There is one more very important thing we should all do to keep our teeth healthy — visit our dentist regularly. What does your dentist do? Let's list some of the things that can happen during a routine dental visit. [Examines your teeth, gums and the rest of your mouth to see if they are healthy; tells you how to take good care of your teeth; fixes cavities and repairs teeth; checks your mouth for sores and signs of cancer; sometimes takes X-rays to see the insides of teeth and jawbone; gives you a fluoride treatment.]

What else? [You have your teeth professionally cleaned.] Why is that important? [Even when you brush well, some plaque stays on your teeth and, over time, hardens into tartar. Tartar can only be removed by a professional cleaning.] Who remembers what we said earlier about why tartar must be removed from teeth? [Tartar must be removed because it makes your teeth more difficult to clean. If tartar is not removed, it can lead to *gingivitis*, an early form of gum disease in which your gums become irritated and can bleed easily.]

Ask your dentist when your next visit should be!

**Visit your dentist regularly.  
A routine dental visit includes an examination of your teeth  
and mouth, professional cleaning, and may include X-rays,  
repair of damaged teeth and a fluoride treatment.**

**Summary:** *Good oral health care provides many benefits that go beyond cavity prevention.*

- *It helps keep your whole body healthy and fit.*
- *It can help you do your best at school and in sports, because you will feel better, both physically and mentally.*
- *It has cosmetic benefits, including a nicer looking smile, fresh breath, and social confidence.*



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