2 days: 10- to 15-minute lessons

Day 1:

Teaching Guides

Brushing, Flossing and Rinsing
Children learn easy, everyday ways to prevent tooth decay

**Time to complete:** 5 minutes

**Group size:** Entire class

Fluoride, Checkups and Healthy Eating
Children learn simple steps to a lifetime of good dental health

**Time to complete:** 5 minutes

**Group size:** Entire class

Day 2

Activity

Guess the Nutritious Foods
Reinforce scientific deduction and prediction, as well as the dental-health lessons, and encourage the students to eat healthy foods.

**Time to complete:** 15 minutes

**Group size:** Small groups or entire class

**Recommended book:** “I Know Why I Brush My Teeth” By Kate Rowan
Brushing, Flossing and Rinsing

Everyday Ways to Prevent Tooth Decay

**Brushing**

- Dentists recommend a child-sized toothbrush with soft bristles.

- Use a pea-size amount of fluoride toothpaste with cavity protection that is also gentle on enamel, and spit out the remaining toothpaste when finished brushing. Children under 2 years should consult a dentist prior to use of fluoride toothpaste.

- Brush at least **twice a day**, morning and bedtime, for about 2 minutes each time.

- Toothpaste works with a combination of fluoride to help repair and strengthen tooth enamel; gentle abrasives (such as silica) to help remove stains and plaque, and polish teeth; detergents (such as sodium lauryl sulfate) to create a foaming action that makes brushing easier; and other ingredients to help whiten teeth, freshen breath, etc.

**Flossing**

- Helps remove plaque between teeth and below the gum line, and also helps prevent gingivitis, an early form of gum disease.

- Children should floss as soon as their teeth begin to touch.

- Until about age 8, most children need parents’ help because they don’t have the dexterity to floss. A plastic-handled “flosser” can make it easier.

- Floss regularly.

**Rinsing**

- An antimicrobial rinse can kill germs that cause plaque, gingivitis and bad breath. Rinsing for 30 seconds, twice a day, can kill more plaque than brushing alone.

- A fluoride rinse can help strengthen teeth and prevent cavities.

- Children 6-12 years of age can use a rinse with adult supervision. Always read and follow the directions for the mouthrinse that you use.

- After rinsing, spit the rinse in the sink (don’t swallow it).

- Rinse should be used in conjunction with brushing and flossing.
Fluoride, Checkups and Healthy Eating
For a Lifetime of Good Dental Health

Fluoride
- A mineral that helps strengthen tooth enamel — and repair damaged enamel.
- Helps enhance tooth strength with the body's own minerals, such as calcium.
- Protects teeth from acid attack.
- Inhibits bacteria in plaque from producing acid.
- Children can get fluoride through:
  - Water
  - Fluoride supplements (usually tablets)
  - Professional fluoride treatments
  - Fluoride gels, rinses, toothpastes

Dental Checkups
Ideally, children should visit a dentist:
- Within 6 months of the eruption of their first baby tooth.
- Then twice a year or as recommended by the child's dentist.

At a checkup, the dentist and/or dental hygienist will:
- Examine the child’s mouth for early signs of decay or other problems.
- Monitor tooth growth.
- Clean the teeth.
- If necessary, strengthen the teeth with a fluoride treatment.
- Dentists sometimes recommend sealants — clear plastic coatings over the chewing surfaces of back teeth, where decay most often occurs. Sealants shield uneven surfaces from food and plaque.

If children are anxious about going to the dentist, you can ease their fears with a few simple facts:
- Dentists and dental hygienists are friendly people who help to keep teeth healthy.
- Explain what happens at a dental checkup and why.
- Explain the instruments and equipment the dentist might use in the office.
- Explain why dentists and hygienists wear gloves and masks.
- Ask a local dentist or hygienist to visit your class.

Healthy Eating
Snacks – Sugars and starches can contribute to tooth decay. Encourage students to:
- Limit the number of snacks they eat.
- Choose nutritious snacks such as raw vegetables, fruits and low-fat cheese.
- Limit sugary sodas and sports drinks. Note: Snacking or sipping on sugary food or drink over extended periods of time throughout the day can be especially harmful.
**Guess the Nutritious Food**

**Activity**
Place nutritious foods such as bananas, apples or carrots (or pictures of foods) in a lunch bag or other opaque container. Invite students to guess what the food is by asking questions that can be answered “yes” or “no.” Model the questions to encourage students to ask about the food’s color, size, shape or texture. Make this a daily activity by asking a different student each day to bring a healthy food from home in a bag (all students can participate by predicting which foods will or won’t be brought in), then have the class guess the food.

**Learning Objective**
Reinforces scientific deduction and prediction, as well as the dental-health lessons, and encourages the students to eat healthy foods.

**Materials**
Healthy foods (or pictures of foods), brown paper bag or other opaque container

**Preparation Time**
None

**Group Size**
Small groups or class