

# Oral Health Tips

## Ring in the New Year With A Healthy Smile

The celebration of the New Year is the oldest of all holidays; it dates back over 4,000 years. Making New Year's resolutions is a long-standing tradition. The logic behind the tradition is to chase away the bad habits of the previous year, leading to good health and fortune in the coming year. The New Year is a great time to resolve to follow through on good dental health habits for your family.

### Six Smile Resolutions

Celebrate the New Year by starting a resolution to maintain or improve dental health for you and your family.

1. Resolve to brush your teeth at least twice a day with fluoride toothpaste. Learning proper brushing techniques is essential to maintain good oral health and prevent gum disease. Brushing helps remove decay-causing plaque from tooth surfaces. Fluoride reduces tooth decay and prevents cavities by strengthening tooth enamel.

Parents and caregivers of children should follow the directions on fluoride toothpaste that has the ADA Seal of Acceptance. And, they should consult a dentist or health care provider before introducing a child under the age of two to fluoride toothpaste. For children under the age of six who use fluoride toothpaste, place no more than a pea-sized amount of toothpaste on the toothbrush and help brush the child's teeth (recommended particularly for preschool-aged children) and supervise the tooth brushing. Encourage the child to spit out excess toothpaste (this avoids the child ingesting more fluoride than is recommended).

2. Resolve to floss daily. It is important to floss once a day between all teeth in the mouth for at least two to three minutes. Flossing cleans areas between the teeth where the toothbrush

can't reach. Start in the same place each time and work around the mouth. For children, flossing should begin when there are two teeth in the mouth that touch together. Parents can help floss children's teeth until they are able to floss by themselves.

3. Resolve to eat a nutritious and healthy diet. Good nutrition plays an important role in dental health. Eating a healthy diet should include a variety of foods from the main food groups, but it is equally as important to limit snacking between meals. Continuous contact with foods and beverages that are high in sugar can negatively affect the teeth and gums. Make a resolution to cut down on the number of sugary drinks and sticky, sugary snacks. Instead, offer your children water, fruits and vegetables for snacks. Also, offer water to your children to drink after meals to help cleanse the teeth.

4. Resolve to throw away old toothbrushes and replace them with new ones. It is recommended that a toothbrush be replaced when the bristles bend or look worn – about every three to four

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months or after an illness. Children's brushes may have to be replaced more often.

5. Resolve to visit the dentist regularly. Regular dental visits are important to overall dental health. Be sure to tell your dentist about any medications (new or existing) that you or your children are taking. The American Dental Association (ADA) recommends that a child be seen by a dentist as soon as his/her first tooth erupts, but no later than the child's first birthday.
6. Resolve not to use any tobacco products. Tobacco in any form can increase the risk of oral cancer. Smokeless tobacco is no safer than cigarettes. Be a good role model to your children and talk to your children about the bad effects of tobacco use. If you use any tobacco products, make a resolution to eliminate these harmful substances.

Start off the New Year with healthy resolutions that will make you smile and create healthy dental habits that last a lifetime for you and your children.

Source: American Dental Association: [www.ada.org](http://www.ada.org)