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I **Fact Sheet** Family Oral Health I

# Good Oral Health Starts at Home

Maintaining a healthy smile for a lifetime starts early. That's why it's important for you and your family to visit your general dentist regularly and practice good oral hygiene at home.

## Why is brushing so important?

Regular toothbrushing with toothpaste plays a major role in reducing the growth of plaque—a thin, sticky film of bacteria that creates cavities, tooth decay, and gum disease. When you brush your teeth, you remove most of the plaque-causing bacteria. Brushing also helps clean and polish your teeth, removes stains, freshens your breath, and leaves your mouth feeling clean.

## What is the best technique for brushing?

There are a number of effective brushing techniques. Patients are advised to check with their dentist or hygienist to determine which technique is best for them, since tooth position and gum condition vary. One effective, easy-to-remember technique involves using a circular or elliptical motion to brush a couple of teeth at a time, gradually covering the entire mouth. Avoid using a back-and-forth motion, because this can cause the gum surface to recede, can expose the root surface, or make the root surface tender.

## How long should I brush?

It is recommended that you spend at least two minutes brushing your teeth at least twice a day. If you think you're already doing a good job, you might be surprised: Patients generally think they



are brushing longer than they are—most spend less than one minute brushing. To make sure you are brushing for the full two minutes, set an egg timer or invest in a toothbrush with a built-in timer. And, be sure to spend the time wisely: Brush the front and back of teeth, the tongue, the chewing surfaces, and between teeth.

## How can I get my children to brush?

The best way to guide your family to good oral health is to lead by example. Start by making dental care part of your family's daily routine. Depending on the age of your child, there are a number of methods that parents can try to

encourage good oral health habits. Some suggestions for making toothbrushing less of a battle with young children include allowing your child to pick out his or her toothbrush (a variety of styles, including musical models, are designed to appeal to kids); letting your child see you and other family members brushing their teeth; and allowing your child to brush his or her own teeth. Parents should supervise toothbrushing by children younger than age 8 to make sure they are doing a thorough job. Parents also should assist young children with daily flossing.

Do you have questions about your family's oral health care? Be sure to talk to your dentist.