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A FESTIVE SURVIVAL KIT FOR MOUTHS THIS CHRISTMAS

Dentists love a party too - but urge moderation in the festive season

RADIO GRABS ATTACHED FOR USE

DURING CHRISTMAS AND THE SCHOOL HOLIDAYS health matters often take a back seat and sugar consumption skyrockets through those extra food treats and drinking alcohol. But as tooth decay is the most common chronic disease in both adults and children, dentists have today released an **Oral Health Survival Kit** urging people not to let their mouths become a Christmas casualty.

Statistics show that 42% of Australian children aged 5-10 years have experienced tooth decay in their primary teeth ¹, 24% of children aged six to 14 have experienced tooth decay in their adult teeth, and 27% of five-to 10-year-olds have untreated dental decay ².

Figures for older kids show one in six teenagers consumes over 5kg of sugar throughout the year from sugary drinks alone, about the same weight as a family cat, making sugar consumption and tooth decay a national problem.

"While Christmas and the summer break is undoubtedly Australia's favourite time of the year, the festive season presents more opportunities for eating foods and having drinks that can harm teeth, and for oral injuries to happen when families are on holidays," said the new Australian Dental Association President Dr Scott Davis.

"To help oral health survive this time of indulgence and sense of freedom, the ADA has written an **Oral Health Survival Kit** to ensure you get to the end of the season with yours and your family's oral health in tact. It goes beyond the old saying of not cracking your walnuts with your teeth!"

Here's the ADA's Oral Health Survival Kit to get your oral health through the holiday season.

🦷 Mouthguards – even if the kids don't have sports club games, heading out to play these games during the Christmas break still needs mouthguards – and the same goes for any activities where there's risk of mouth injury. Over summer just about everyone spends more time outdoors – whether it's kids climbing trees or the whole family playing backyard cricket on Christmas Day. Whatever the occasion, make sure the mouthguards get washed and left somewhere handy so everyone can find them easily for safe summer sports and games.

"Dentists often see kids in their practices during holidays with traumatic dental injuries that could've been prevented, or damage reduced, had they been wearing a protective mouthguard," said Dr Davis, a prosthodontist from Port Macquarie. "The best mouthguards are from your dentist as they're customised to fit the size and shape of the patient's mouth."

If a tooth is knocked out and has been found, dentists advise putting it in a glass of milk and heading straight to the your dentist as they may be able to re-insert it.

🦷 Avoid thoughtless eating and drinking – dentists love a party the same as the next person. "We're not the Grinch, but at this time of year it's about moderation," said Dr Davis.

"Plenty of our chosen festive food and drinks can negatively affect the health of our teeth, so it's important that we be mindful of keeping good eating and drinking habits during this time."



Thoughtless eating is when we eat without even thinking twice about it, it's eating because food is there, not because we're hungry. An easy rule of thumb before reaching for that next sweet treat is to ask yourself: 'am I really hungry?' Consider a more tooth-friendly snack instead, such as savoury popcorn.

The ADA's *Tooth-friendly Treats Cookbook* includes 20 dentist-recommended sweet treat recipes that are great to get you through the holiday season when you want something sweet. It makes a great Christmas gift and profits from the sales go to the Australian Dental Health Foundation, which helps disadvantaged Australians access dental care. Purchase the hard copy or e-book at: www.teeth.org.au/teeth/Shop

- 🦷 **Can the candy cane** – hard lollies are the worst. They're made of 100% sugar and are often responsible for accidents involving broken teeth or fillings. They also take longer to dissolve in the mouth, meaning the teeth are exposed to sugar for longer, increasing the risk of tooth decay, so swap for a tooth-friendly treat or a small, non-edible one instead.
- 🦷 **Limit sugary drinks and alcohol** – most people are aware that sugary drinks can contribute to tooth decay – but alcohol is an aspect of Christmas people don't normally associate with tooth decay – with regular alcoholic drinks potentially increasing the risk.

If drinking spirits, minimise your sugar intake by choosing soda water as a mixer rather than a soft drink like lemonade. Drinking a glass of water between alcoholic drinks is also a good idea as it helps to rinse away some of the acid from the drink. Alcohol can also make you dehydrated, so regularly drinking water can also help you to stay hydrated because a dry mouth is also a factor in tooth decay risk.

For kids it's useful to be aware that there are typically 26 teaspoons of sugar in an average one litre cola bottle, so encourage them to drink tap water or milk instead of sugary drinks to help prevent decay.

One final tip – wait at least an hour between your last alcoholic or fizzy drink and teeth brushing. Brushing too soon can damage the softened tooth enamel caused by acidity in the drinks.

- 🦷 **Flossing** – with all the eating and drinking you may be doing, don't forget to floss daily – or if you don't do it yet, make the Christmas break a great time to get into the habit. It only takes a few minutes a day and helps to remove all the food debris sitting between your teeth. In fact brushing only removes 60% of food debris and you need to floss to remove the remaining 40%. If you don't, consider that you'll have small particles of food rotting between your teeth.
- 🦷 **Access your free dental entitlement** – only 38% of eligible families use their Child Dental Benefits Schedule entitlement. Qualifying families with children up to age 18 who receive Family Tax Benefit Part A or other Australian government payment, are entitled to dental work up to the value of \$1,052 in every two year period. Families can check their child's eligibility through their Medicare online account at MyGov.
- 🦷 **Looking after your teeth while on holidays and travelling** – to avoid dental issues while you're a long way from home and your local dentist, book in appointments for the family before you go. That way any niggling issues can be resolved before heading off, and the kids can have their back-to-school checkup ahead of the usual end of January scramble for appointments.

If you're travelling, keep up the dental basics while away – stopping brushing and flossing even for three days can result in plaque build-up and gingivitis starting. A toothbrush, toothpaste and flossing device take up minimal space in your luggage and will go a long way to protecting your oral health while travelling. In some countries where drinking tap water is out, staying hydrated and brushing with bottled water will do a good job in the short term. Lastly, pack mouthguards if you're planning sporting or leisure activities.

To interview Dr Davis call ADA Media Advisor Jenny Barlass 0403 336648 (not the number in the footer below) RADIO GRABS ATTACHED.

1. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/australias-children/contents/health/dental-health>
2. <https://www.teeth.org.au/Dental-Professionals/Australia-s-Oral-Health-Tracker>