

# Don't put your oral health on vacation

By Dr. Eric Gustavsen, Published in the Walla Walla Union Bulletin 7/13/12

Summer time is upon us and don't we love it! Problem is, healthy habits can be put in storage until after Labor Day. Exercise, diet plans, and care of the mouth can all suffer. Allow me to make some suggestions for keeping teeth and gums healthy over summer vacation. Or as dentists are fond of saying "ignore your teeth and they'll go away."

Staying hydrated on a hot day is very important. Be careful however, not to sip all day from drinks with the potential to cause tooth decay. It's widely known that sodas such as Coke and it's caustic cousins cause decay but be very careful with so called energy drinks, sports drinks and even sweetened ice teas, such as Lemon



Snapple. The acid in these drinks can leach away the calcium in your teeth. (If you would like a more complete list of which drinks cause decay email us at [contactus@southpointdentalcenter.com](mailto:contactus@southpointdentalcenter.com)) In case there is some confusion, the human machine actually runs best on zero calorie, unsweetened, no caffeine added cool clear water.

Give children healthy snacks with low potential for causing cavities such as cheese, whole fruit, carrots and nuts. Avoid sugary or sticky snacks like Gummi Bears, Skittles, fruit leather, raisins etc. as they will cling to the enamel and feed the "sugar bugs" that eat holes in youngster's teeth. You're kids will thank you for it. Someday.

If you are not able to brush your teeth after a meal, try to plan ahead to have sugar free gum containing the natural sweetener Xylitol on hand. A great tasting brand is called Ice Breakers

"Ice Cubes" by the Hershey Company. The combination of saliva created by chewing the gum and the physical properties of the gum will help to sponge away cavity causing bacteria that multiply wildly when a person can't brush.

When going on an extended trip, plan ahead for your oral care needs just as you would for other areas of personal hygiene. If you are going to be taking a long flight, get a small travel toothbrush that you can put in your carry on luggage. It provides a good reason to stretch your legs and puzzle over the faucet controls on that miniature airplane sink. Your dentist, (or the local pharmacy) will be happy to provide you with a tiny tube of toothpaste that you can boldly take through airport security.

Bring along an electric toothbrush for when you reach your destination. The charge of the better ones like Braun Oral B and Sonicare will last about 2 weeks. Some models can be charged overseas with the proper adapter. You will also want to be sure to bring along a couple of tools to clean between your teeth such as floss and tiny "go between" brushes or reusable plastic tooth picks. Few things are as annoying as getting a piece of alien food caught between your teeth and not having any way to remove it.

If you have been treated for gum/periodontal disease you will want to be very careful to maintain your good oral care habits while on vacation. Other wise the infection that causes these problems will get reestablished. I suggest having your dentist prescribe an effective mouthwash named Peridex for short-term use while you are on your trip. Remember that gum/periodontal problems are caused by bugs living *between* your teeth so make sure you have something to clean between the teeth as a toothbrush can't possibly sweep into this area.

Maintaining good habits during your summer vacation is the best way to avoid problems in the fall. Plus it allows your teeth to compliment your tan. Have a great summer!