

EASY BACK-TO-SCHOOL LUNCH TIPS FOR GOOD ORAL HEALTH

As the NSW school year kicks off on 30 January, with around 1.3 million students also returning to the daily routine of filling school lunchboxes, the ADA NSW has some tips for families keen to reduce hidden sugars daily and improve their kids' oral health now and for the future.

"With rising grocery costs still pushing pressure on many families, making healthy and affordable kid's lunches is important. We know many packaged foods, even those that appear healthier like muesli bars and dried fruits, are higher in sugar than many families realise. As a dentist and a father of three children, I am conscious that good oral health starts early in life," said Australian Dental Association New South Wales (ADA NSW) President, Dr Dominic Aouad (pictured).

"The lasting impacts of daily sugar consumption are still causing high rates of tooth decay or gum disease over time. This can lead to more invasive dental treatments for children such as fillings and early extractions and also contribute to greater hospitalisations and chronic diseases such as Type 2 diabetes later down the track."

For example, a lunch that includes dried apricots, a flavoured yogurt, and a fruit juice box delivers more than double the recommended daily amount of sugar. Limiting sugar consumption is key to preventing tooth decay, which is the most common chronic disease in childhood.

Over 40% of Australians aged 5-10 have dental decay, according to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW).

THE ADA NSW'S EASY TIPS FOR TOOTH-FRIENDLY LUNCHBOXES:

- Include something from each of the five food groups including fruit/vegetables/legumes/beans, dairy, grain (cereal) foods and lean meats poultry/fish/eggs.
- Replace chips, chocolates, muesli bars, and sweet biscuits with items such as fresh fruit, celery and carrot sticks, and cucumbers.
- Limit snacks that are high in sugar and/or saturated fats e.g. donuts
- Pick whole fruit over fruit juice – the vitamins, minerals and fibre make it more filling and nutritious and reduce the sugar content per serve.
- Pack water as your school drink rather than sports drinks, juice, soft drinks, cordials, or flavoured milk which are high in sugar. If your tap water is fluoridated even better.
- Look for grain-based snacks with whole grains and high fibre, such as wholegrain bread and crackers.
- Processed snack products such as muesli and breakfast bars, chips, and cookies should be limited to one item and ideally a low-sugar choice, such as rice crackers, popcorn and cheese.

Regular brushing, and for older kids, flossing as well as annual oral health check-ups with a dentist are also key to setting kids up for a lifetime of good dental care, says Dr Aouad.

1 Source: Schools, 2021 | Australian Bureau of Statistics (abs.gov.au)

2 Source Oral health and dental care in Australia, Healthy teeth - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (aihw.gov.au)

About ADA NSW: ADA NSW is the peak professional association for dentists and dental students in NSW and the ACT with 4,400 members, representing 70 per cent of dentists. ADA NSW has been supporting dentists and promoting good oral health in the community since 1929.

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