**Community & Family Health Program**
**North Shore / Coast Garibaldi**

132 West Esplanade, 5th Floor
North Vancouver, BC V7M 1A2
**Tel:** 604-983-6700 | **Fax:** 604-983-6839

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# Sipping, Snacking and Students' Dental Health

## Tooth decay can have a great impact on students:

- Tooth decay, the most common disorder of childhood, can lead to pain, lack of sleep, poor self-esteem and difficulty chewing nutritious foods.
- Learning can be affected when children miss school days or can't focus in the class due to these problems.
- Missing or sore, decayed teeth can make it difficult to talk clearly and smile confidently.

## What causes tooth decay?

- Plaque – the soft, sticky deposit that grows on teeth – causes cavities. Plaque is made of bacteria that live in the mouth and feed on sugars and starches left after eating and drinking.
- Bacteria and sugar/starches produce an acid that weakens the tooth surface and leads to tooth decay. These "acid attacks" last about 20 minutes each time we eat or drink.
- Between meals and snacks, saliva helps repair the damage caused by acid attacks. However, each sip or bite of sugary or starchy food or drink starts the acid attack all over again. Saliva can't keep up with the damage if we "graze" or sip frequently, or if sugary/starchy foods are stuck to our teeth.

## What can parents do to help?

Some food and beverage choices at school can increase and prolong acid attacks on students' teeth, putting them at greater risk for tooth decay. Here's how you can help:

- Choose food items that don't stick to teeth, such as fresh fruit, vegetables, cheese, nuts or popcorn. Sticky foods like dried fruits (fruit leather, raisins), granola bars, crackers, cereals, tortillas, potato/corn/apple chips and candies (like fruit roll-ups), stick to tooth surfaces and remain on the teeth longer. Nutritious sticky foods (like dried fruit), could be offered as lunch items only sometimes. Sticky foods are better eaten when your child can brush after.
- Encourage your child to drink only plain water between meals. Diet drinks and flavoured waters may not contain sugar, but most contain acids. Fruit juices also contain natural acids and natural sugars. These drinks can also cause "acid attacks" and should be avoided to sip on between meals.
- Ensure your child brushes with a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste twice a day and floss once a day. Children under 8 years of age should have their teeth brushed and flossed by an adult.
- Be a good role model for your child and follow these sipping and snacking tips yourself.

**Healthy snacks and beverages provide children with the energy and nutrients they need to learn and grow however, grazing and sipping throughout the day will cause too many acid attacks.**

Source: Act Now BC. Dental Health School Food and Beverage Sales.

For more information, please visit www.vch.ca/dentalhealth or call Carole Charbonneau, Community Dental Hygienist for Vancouver Coastal Health, North Shore at 604-904-6200.