United Concordia - Newsroom

HARRISBURG, Pa. (March 16, 2022) — A national study points to oral care as being a common unmet health care need faced by children with special developmental or physical challenges. During Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month in March, United Concordia Dental offers considerations to help improve their oral health.

According to the 2021 *Oral Health in America: Advances and Challenges* report, nearly 20% of children have special needs stemming from developmental disabilities or physical conditions, such as a cleft lip and/or cleft palate, that impact their oral health. These issues impede their ability to have regular oral hygiene routines or require special accommodations during dental treatment.

“Children with developmental and physical disabilities are at a greater risk of having oral health issues like cavities, enamel irregularities, gum and oral infections, delayed tooth eruptions and more,” said Quinn Dufurrena, DDS, J.D., chief dental officer, United Concordia. “Taking some extra considerations and steps now to help improve special needs children’s oral health, along with a healthy diet, will positively impact their overall health later in life.”

Here are some oral health tips for parents to help make getting into a regular routine easier for children with special physical or development needs:

- **Take an active role in your child’s oral hygiene** Depending on their level of abilities, you may need to help them brush, floss and rinse.
- **Get out of the bathroom**. Try different locations in the house or positions for brushing your child’s teeth until you find a solution that works for you both.
- **Modify the toothbrush to make it easier**. You can make the handle bigger by cutting a slit into a tennis ball and sliding it on a toothbrush or putting the brush in a bicycle handle. Or add a strap to help your child hold it.
- **Try an electronic toothbrush**. This is especially helpful for children with decreased coordination or fine motor skills and may reduce cleaning time as opposed to regular brushing.
- **Make oral hygiene fun**. Consider activities like singing songs, telling stories or naming the alphabet.
- **Find the right dentist**. Dental care visits may be anxiety producing; pediatric dentists with kid-friendly environments or dentists skilled in serving clients with special needs are likely to offer a more accommodating experience.

For more oral health tips, visit the Oral Health Resources section atUnitedConcordia.com.

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