Dental Health Activities

Circle discussions: Before we begin our dental health unit, I ask the class to brainstorm what they know about teeth. After we read a book or two about dental health, we talk about the purpose of teeth, how we take care of them, and why we need to visit the dentist regularly.

Our brainstorming usually triggers a discussion about healthy and non-healthy foods. We cut out pictures of healthy and non-healthy foods and make charts on the board. We also talk about the effects of sugar on teeth and the terms bacteria and plaque.

Literacy activities: Show Me Your Smile!: A Visit to the Dentist (Dora the Explorer) by Christine Ricci and Dear Tooth Fairy by Pamela Duncan Edwards are two of my favorite books.

Songs and fingerplays: Here’s a favorite dental health song.

```
Brush Your Teeth (to the tune of Row, Row, Row Your Boat)

Brush, brush, brush those teeth,
Several times a day.
Up and down, round and round.
Scrub those germs away!
```

Art projects: Why not try a little toothbrush art? Provide a large yellow tooth shape for each child. Have the children "clean their teeth" by using new dollar store toothbrushes and painting the teeth white!

Number sense: Have student practice counting the number of teeth on the top of their mouths and on the bottom. If it makes it easier, walk students through counting the teeth in a large mouth shape you put on the board.

Large motor skills: If you like Duck, Duck, Goose! , you'll love this game. Have children sit in a circle. The It person walks around the circle, tapping each child and saying, “Brush, brush…floss!” The person he or she names Floss has to hop up and chase It around, tagging It before It gets back to his or her seat.

Fine motor skills and sensory activities: String a long piece of dental floss with shiny white beads to represent teeth. Along with the beads, you could string a large tooth shape (with two holes punched side by side on the top) cut from sturdy paper. If you're working on the Valentine’s Day theme the next week or just finished it, use a pattern of pink, red, and white beads.
**Dramatic play:** Why not play Dentist? Don't worry—this isn't scary! Have a chair for the patient. Bring in a lab coat or scrubs for the dentist. Provide a bib, toothbrush, pretend toothpaste, floss, and play camera for x-rays. Remind your students not to place anything in the patient's mouth—a pretend exam will be fine.

**Science and discovery:** Here are two teeth experiments that really leave a lasting visual impression.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experiment</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sugar on Teeth</td>
<td>Boil two eggs. Place one in a container of water, and the other in a container of a dark-colored soft drink. After a day or so, check the egg. You should see that the egg in the soft drink is stained, but the egg in water is not. Discuss the importance of brushing your teeth well at least twice a day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acid on Calcium</td>
<td>Collect, rinse, and dry chicken bones. Place a few bones in a large container and pour vinegar (an acid) over the bones. Place the other bones in a container with nothing added. Observe the bones for a few days. The bones in the acid become softer than the other bones because the acid eats away at the calcium in the bones. Remind your class that food left between teeth also turns into acid, which can eat away at teeth.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>