

# Increasing Health Literacy in Dental Settings: Key Recommendations for Practice

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# 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy

- The average American reads at the 8th to 9th grade level
- Fourteen percent of Americans have below basic health literacy.
- 36% of adults were identified as having serious limitations in health literacy skills

Kutner M, Greenberg E, Jin Y, Paulsen C. *The Health Literacy of America's Adults: Results from the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy* (NCES 2006-483). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics; 2006.

# Health Literacy: A Prescription to End Confusion

- In the U.S., limited literacy skills are a stronger predictor of an individual's health status than age, income, employment status, education level, and racial or ethnic group.
- Health information is unnecessarily complex.
- Clinicians need health literacy training.

Nielsen-Bohlman L, Panzer AM, Kindig DA, eds. *Health Literacy: A Prescription to End Confusion*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press; 2004.

# Health Literacy – The Facts

- Limited health literacy is estimated to cost the U.S. between \$100 and \$200 billion each year.

Vernon JA, Trujillo A, Rosenbaum S, DeBuono B. *Low Health Literacy: Implications for National Policy*. 2007.

# Dr. Richard Carmona, Former U.S. Surgeon General

**“As a former nurse, trauma surgeon, and public health director [I realized] there was a wall between us and the people we were trying to serve.**

**Health care professionals do not recognize that patients do not understand the health information we are trying to communicate.**

**We must close the gap between what health care professionals know and what the rest of America understands.”**



Dr. Richard Carmona, Former U.S. Surgeon General

## Rear Admiral Kenneth P. Moritsugu, Former U.S Acting Surgeon General

*“Low health literacy is a threat to the health and wellbeing of Americans. And low health literacy crosses all sectors of our society. All ages, races, incomes, and education levels are challenged by low health literacy.”*



Rear Admiral Kenneth P. Moritsugu, MD, MPH  
Former Acting U.S. Surgeon General  
December 2006

# Regina M. Benjamin, MD, MBA, Former Acting Surgeon General

“As clinicians, what we say does not matter unless our patients are able to understand the information we give them well enough to use it to make good health-care decisions. Otherwise, we didn’t reach them, and that is the same as if we didn’t treat them.”



Regina M. Benjamin, MD, MBA  
Former Acting Surgeon General January 2012



## Vivek H. Murthy, M.D., M.B.A., Former Surgeon General

“First, we will combat misinformation with clear communication. Whether e-cigarettes or the latest diet fad, marijuana or the measles, we will give the American people the best information so they can make good decisions for their own health.”



Vivek H. Murthy, M.D., M.B.A., Former Surgeon General  
April 2015



“If we want health equity, we need to make health literacy a  
priority.”

- Sylvia Burwell, Former Secretary, U.S. Department of  
Health and Human Services.

# What is Health Literacy?

# Definition - Health Literacy

Health literacy is the degree to which an individual has the capacity to obtain, communicate, process, and understand basic health information and services to make appropriate health decisions.

Institute of Medicine. 2004. *Health Literacy: A Prescription to End Confusion*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/10883>

# Health Literacy is a two-way street!



# Health Literacy Skill for the Provider

- Help people find information and services
- Communicate about health and healthcare.
- Process what people are explicitly and implicitly asking for.
- Understand how to provide useful information and services.
- Decide which information and services work best for different situations and people so they can act.

Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Learn About Health Literacy. <http://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/learn/>

# Health Literacy Skills for the patient

- Find information and services.
- Communicate their needs and preferences and respond to information and services.
- Process the meaning and usefulness of the information and services.
- Understand the choices, consequences and context of the information and services.
- Decide which information and services match their needs and preferences so they can act.

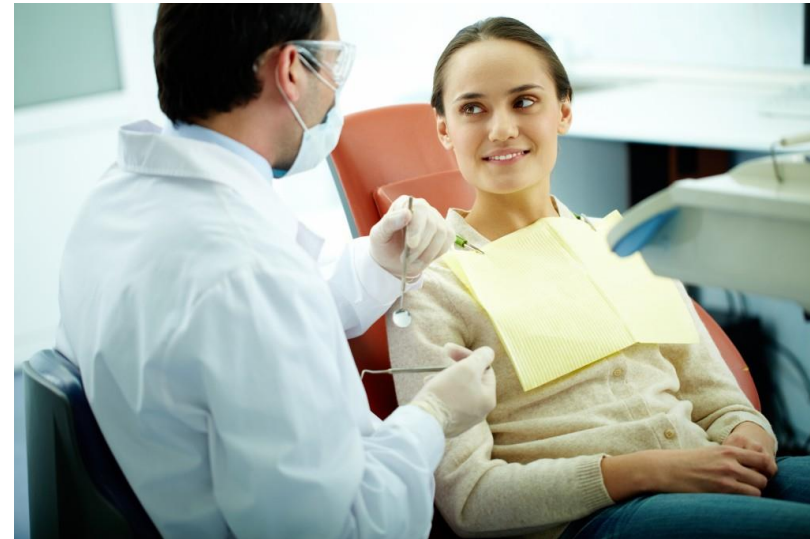
Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Learn About Health Literacy. <http://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/learn/>

# What's Your Role in Health Literacy?



# Lessons Learned From Patients

- Tell me what's wrong (briefly)
- What do I need to **do** & why
- Emphasize **benefits** (for me)



**Remember: what's clear to you is clear to you!**

Agency for Health Research and Quality **Health Literacy Universal Precautions Toolkit, 2nd edition.**  
<http://www.ahrq.gov/professionals/quality-patient-safety/quality-resources/tools/literacy-toolkit/index.html>

# Strategies to Improve Patient Understanding

- Focus on “need-to-know” & “need-to-do”
- Use Teach-Back Method
- Demonstrate/draw pictures
- Use clearly written education materials

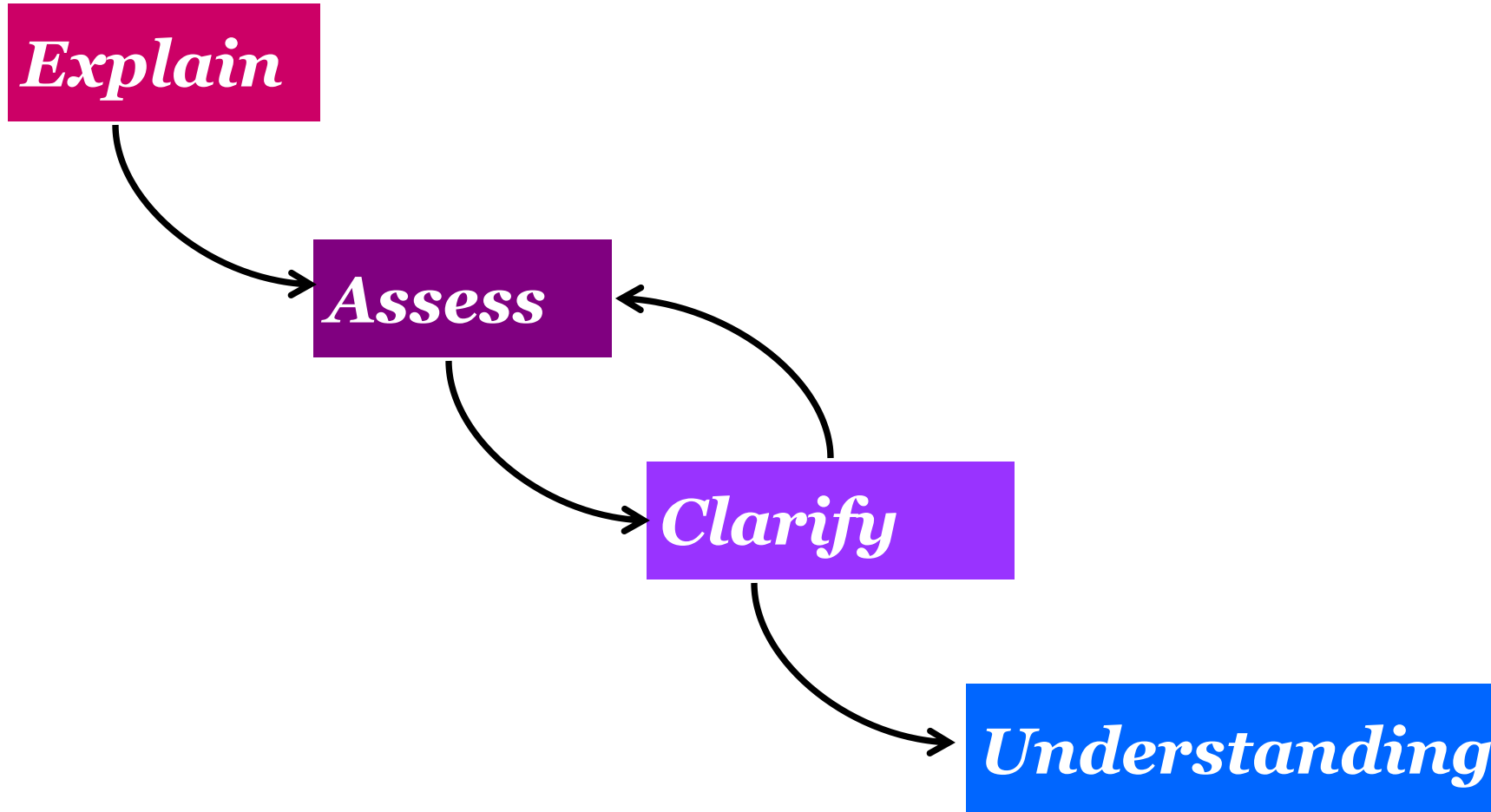
Agency for Health Research and Quality **Health Literacy Universal Precautions Toolkit, 2nd edition.**  
<http://www.ahrq.gov/professionals/quality-patient-safety/quality-resources/tools/literacy-toolkit/index.html>

## What do patients need to know/do...?

- When they leave the operator
- When they check out
- What do they need to know about?
  - Taking medicines
  - Self-care
  - Referrals and follow-ups
  - Filling out forms

Agency for Health Research and Quality **Health Literacy Universal Precautions Toolkit, 2nd edition.**  
<http://www.ahrq.gov/professionals/quality-patient-safety/quality-resources/tools/literacy-toolkit/index.html>

# *Teach-back*



# Teach-Back Method

- Ensuring agreement and understanding about the care plan is essential to achieving adherence
- “I want to make sure I explained it correctly. Can you tell me in your words how you understand the plan?”

Schillinger, D. Archives of Internal Med, 2003

# Confirm patient understanding

“Tell me what you’ve understood.”

“I want to make sure I explained your medicine clearly. Can you tell me how you will take your medicine?”

Agency for Health Research and Quality **Health Literacy Universal Precautions Toolkit, 2nd edition.** <http://www.ahrq.gov/professionals/quality-patient-safety/quality-resources/tools/literacy-toolkit/index.html>

**Do you understand?**

**Do you have any questions?**

# Patient Education: What We Know

- Written materials, when used alone, will not adequately inform.
- Patients prefer receiving **key messages from their clinician with accompanying pamphlets.**
- Focus needs to be “need-to-know” & “need-to do”
- Patients with low literacy tend to ask fewer questions.
- Bring a family member and medication to appointments.





# Visuals Improve Understanding/ Recall

- ✓ Pictures/demonstrations most helpful to patient with low literacy & visual learners
- ✓ Most health drawings too complicated
- ✓ Physician drawings often very good (not too complex)
- ✓ Patients say “show me” & “I can do it”

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<http://www.ahrq.gov/professionals/quality-patient-safety/quality-resources/tools/literacy-toolkit/index.html>


# 7 Tips for Clinicians

- Use plain language
- Limit information (3-5 key points)
- Be specific and concrete, not general
- Demonstrate, draw pictures, use models
- Repeat/summarize
- Teach-Back (confirm understanding)
- Be positive, hopeful, empowering

# Use Plain Language

- Screening
- Dermatologist
- Anesthetic
- Endodontist
- Hypertension
- Oral
- Diabetes
- Diet
- Hygiene
- Prevention
- Mental Health
- Annually
- Depression
- Respiratory problems
- Community Resources
- Monitor
- Cardiovascular
- Referral
- Eligible
- Periodontist

# Examples of Plain Language

		<b>Plain Language</b>
▪ <b>Annually</b>		Yearly or every year
▪ <b>Gingivitis</b>		Infected gums
▪ <b>Cardiovascular</b>		Having to do with the heart
▪ <b>Diabetes</b>		Elevated sugar in the blood
▪ <b>Amalgam</b>		Silver filling
• <b>Periodontist</b>		Dentist who treats gum disease

# Is your Clinic/ Site Patient-Centered?

- A welcoming, calm environment
- An attitude of helpfulness by **all** staff
- Patients treated as if your family
- Patient-centered check-in & scheduling
- Easy-to-follow instructions/ directions
- Patient-centered handouts
- Brief telephone follow-up
- Case management



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# What is the ADA Doing About Health Literacy in Dentistry?

# National Advisory Committee on Health Literacy in Dentistry





## **Definition of Oral Health Literacy (*Trans.2005:322; 2006:316*)**

**Resolved**, that it is the ADA's position that oral health literacy is the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate oral health decisions.

# ADA Policy on Limited Oral Health Literacy Skills

## Limited Oral Health Literacy Skills and Understanding in Adults

**Resolved**, that the ADA recognizes that limited oral health literacy is a potential barrier to effective prevention, diagnosis and treatment of oral disease.

## Use of Health Literacy Principles for All Patients

**Resolved**, that ADA supports the use of health literacy principles and plain language for *all* patients and providers to make it easier for them to navigate, understand and use appropriate information and services to help patients be stewards of their oral health.

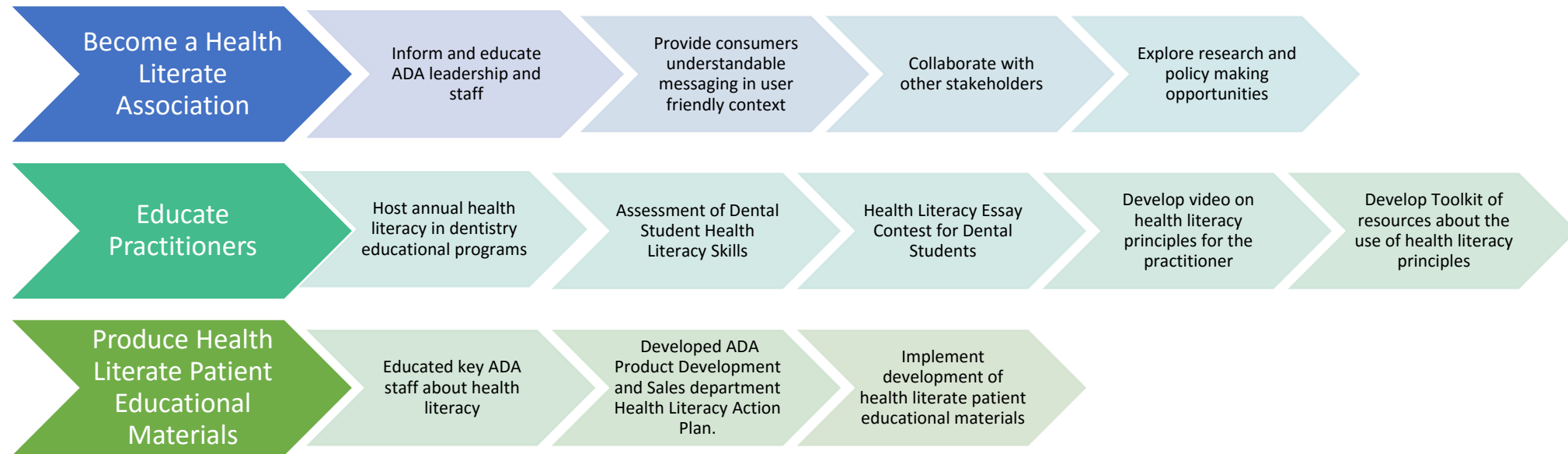
**Resolved**, CAPIR approves the Health Literacy in Dentistry Action Plan 2016-2020; and be it further

**Resolved**, CAPIR recommends that the action plan be implemented with assistance from other appropriate ADA agencies and in consultation with NACHLD; and be it further

# ADA Health Literacy in Dentistry Action Plan

- Five strategic focus areas for the improvement of health literacy:
  - Training and Education
  - Advocacy
  - Research
  - Dental Practice
  - Build and Maintain Coalitions

# Health Literacy in Dentistry: Advancing the Use of Health Literacy Principles within the ADA and by the Dental Profession



# ADA Health Literacy in Dentistry Webpage

MEMBER CENTER EDUCATION/CAREERS SCIENCE/RESEARCH ADVOCACY PUBLICATIC

## Public Programs

MouthHealthy

Fluoride in Water

ADA Find-a-Dentist

Action for Dental Health

Championing Oral Health in Schools

Health Literacy in Dentistry >

Give Kids A Smile

Choosing Wisely

National Children's Dental Health Month

ADA Seal of Acceptance

Volunteer Efforts

Advocating for the Public

Prevention Summit

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Home > Public Programs > Health Literacy in Dentistry

## Health Literacy in Dentistry

ADA policy defines oral health literacy as the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate oral health decisions. It also recognizes that by improving health literacy, patients are better stewards of their own health. You can improve health literacy by using simple communication with the patient and confirming comprehension so that the risk of miscommunication is minimized. You can support patients' efforts to improve their oral health by using strategies that make the dental office environment and health care system easier to navigate.

## Other Health Literacy Resources

### What is Health Literacy in Dentistry?

#### Increasing the Dental Team's Knowledge about Health Literacy

- [CDC Health Literacy for Public Health Professionals](#)  
A web-based course to educate public health professionals on the importance of health literacy and their role in providing health information and services and promoting public health literacy.
- [Effective Communication Tools for Healthcare Professionals](#)  
Online course on patient-provider communications.
- [Federal Plain Language Guidelines](#)  
The website contains training and resources for writing plain language.
- [Center for Plain Language](#)  
The website contains best practices for using, learning, and teaching



ADA Find-a-Dentist®

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Specialty

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Give Kids A Smile >



MouthHealthy > Nutrition > Food Tips > **Bad Foods Slideshow**

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## Top 9 Foods That Damage Your Teeth



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7 of 9

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### Swap out soda with water

When you eat sugary foods or sip sugary drinks for long periods of time, plaque bacteria use that sugar to produce acids that attack your enamel, the hard surface of your tooth. Most carbonated soft drinks, including diet soda, are acidic and therefore, bad for your teeth. Caffeinated beverages, such as colas can also dry out your mouth. If you consume soft drinks, try to drink water instead.

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Protect the **smiles** you love!

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MouthHealthy > Nutrition > **Healthy Snack Tips for Kids**



## 6 Ways to Reduce Your Child's Sugar Snacking



When working with her young patients, pediatric dentist and ADA spokesperson Dr. Mary Hayes teaches them this simple, but important, rhyme: "Sugar is fun to eat, but not good for your teeth!"

That's because your child might love sweet treats, but the bacteria in his or her mouth loves them even more. "Sucrose (sugar) is the 'food' for the bacteria that cause tooth decay," Dr. Hayes says. "Those bacteria produce acid that etches away the teeth."

Limiting the amount of sugar your entire family eats is good for your teeth and key to your overall health. Here are some dentist-recommended ways to start saying good-bye to unnecessary sugar

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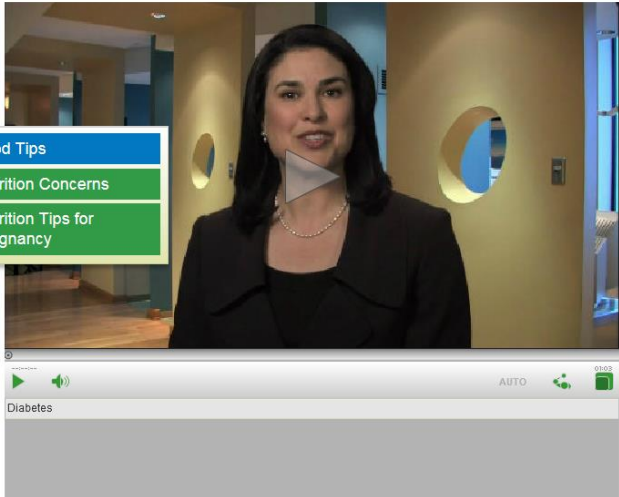


# Health Literacy Essay Contest for Dental Students

MouthHealthy > A-Z Topics > D > Diabetes

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## Diabetes and Your Smile



By **Laura Martin**, Case Western Reserve University School of Dental Medicine

Did you know that 29.1 million people living in the United States have **diabetes**? That's 9.3% of the population. Approximately 1.7 million new cases are diagnosed each year—and 8.1 million people living with diabetes don't even know they have it.

Diabetes affects your body's ability to process sugar. All food you eat is turned to sugar and used for energy. In Type I diabetes, the body doesn't make enough insulin, a hormone that carries sugar from your blood to the cells that need it for energy. In Type II diabetes, the body stops responding to insulin. Both cases result in high blood sugar levels, which can cause problems with your eyes, nerves, kidneys, heart and other parts of your body.

<http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/d/diabetes>

Mouth Healthy™ Brought to you by the ADA American Dental Association®


English | Español

LIFE STAGES ADA SEAL PRODUCTS A-Z TOPICS NUTRITION DENTISTRY

MouthHealthy > Nutrition > Food Tips > Sugar, Drinks and Dental Health

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## The Truth About Sugary Drinks and Your Smile



By **Ida Gorshteyn**, UCLA School of Dentistry student

Sweetened beverages have become a treat that many Americans have every day. The truth is that these drinks are not healthy, especially for our dental health and smiles. Everyone has harmful bacteria in their mouths that eat the sugars we consume. The bacteria

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Give Kids A Smile

MouthHealthyKids.org



# Ad Council Campaign

The screenshot shows the MouthHealthy website interface. At the top left is the MouthHealthy logo, followed by the text "Brought to you by the ADA American Dental Association®". On the right, there are language options for English and Español, social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, and a search bar with a "SEARCH" button. Below the header is a navigation bar with buttons for "PREGNANCY", "BABIES AND KIDS", "TEENS", "ADULTS UNDER 40", "ADULTS 40-60", and "ADULTS OVER 60".

The main content area is titled "A-Z Topics" and includes a list of popular dental slideshows, a MouthHealthy Quiz, and Top Ten Topics. A sidebar on the left contains several topic cards: "ADA Seal Products", "A-Z Topics", "Nutrition", "Dental Care Concerns", and "ADA Dental Symptom Checker" with a "CHECK NOW" button.

The central article is titled "Ad Council" and includes a breadcrumb trail: "MouthHealthy > A-Z Topics > A > Ad Council". It features a "Share" button and a "PARTNERSHIP FOR Healthy Mouths Healthy Lives" logo. The text discusses how advertising can inspire healthy behavior and mentions the Ad Council's Kids' Healthy Mouths campaign. A video thumbnail shows a character from a children's show.

Two advertisements are displayed on the right side. The top one is titled "ADA dentists promise to:" and lists three points: "Do no harm", "Always do good", and "Treat you fairly and honestly", with a link to "The ADA Code of Ethics". The bottom one is titled "Tested. Trusted." and promotes "Search ADA Seal Products now!".

<http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/a/ad-council>

# National Children's Dental Health Month



**ADA.org/nedhm**  
 Brush two minutes, two times a day.  
 Clean between your teeth daily.  
 Limit snacks, eat healthy meals.  
 Visit your dentist regularly.

**ADA Foundation**  
 American Dental Association  
 America's leading advocate for oral health



**ADA.org/nedhm**  
 Cepélate dos minutos, dos veces al día.  
 Limpia entre tus dientes a diario.  
 Limita los refrigerios, come saludable.  
 Visita al dentista regularmente.

**ADA Foundation**  
 American Dental Association  
 Americano líder abogante por la salud bucal

**And eat healthy for a healthy smile!**

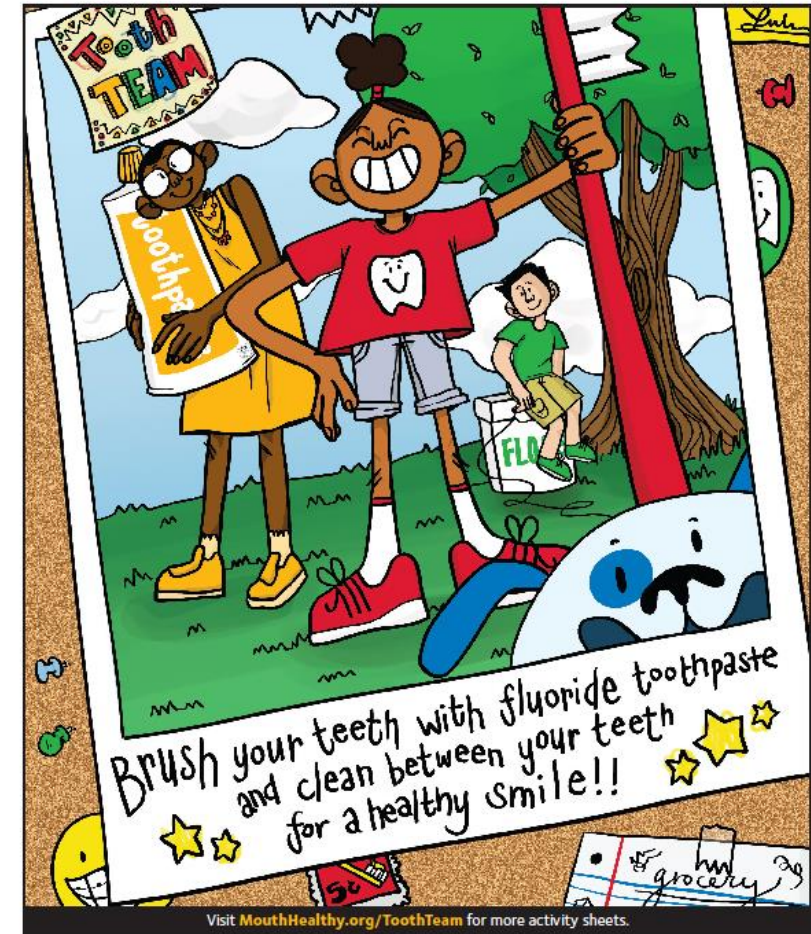
**i2min2x!**  
 Cepélate 2 minutos 2 veces al día  
 y come alimentos saludables  
 para una sonrisa sana!

**Two times a day,  
 with daily,  
 healthy meals,  
 regularly.**

**ADA Foundation**  
 American Dental Association  
 America's leading advocate for oral health



**2min2x!**  
 Brush 2 minutes 2 times a day  
 AND eat healthy for  
 a healthy smile!



Brush your teeth with fluoride toothpaste  
 and clean between your teeth  
 for a healthy smile!!

Visit [MouthHealthy.org/ToothTeam](http://MouthHealthy.org/ToothTeam) for more activity sheets.

**HEALTHY SMILE TIPS**

- Brush your teeth twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste.
- Clean between your teeth daily.
- Eat a healthy diet that limits sugary beverages and snacks.
- See your dentist regularly for prevention and treatment of oral disease.

**Crest** **ADA American Dental Association**

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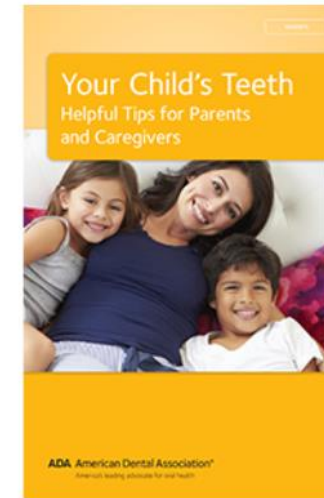
# Patient Education Materials



**La Felicidad es una Sonrisa Sana (Happiness is a Healthy Smi...**



**Seal Out Decay**



**Your Child's Teeth**

# Acknowledgments

Thanks to the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) for use of Health Literacy Universal Precautions Toolkit PPT slides on health literacy principles.



# Questions?

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