

Oral Health Tips

smile discoveriesSM

Ring in the New Year With A Healthy Smile Resolution

The celebration of the New Year is the oldest of all holidays; it dates back over 4,000 years. Making a New Year's resolution is a long-standing tradition. The logic behind the tradition is to chase away the bad habits and sins of the previous year, leaving a clean slate that provides for good health and fortune in the coming year. The New Year is a great time to resolve to follow through on healthy changes to establish or re-establish good dental health habits for your family.

A Brief History

Roman New Year

Romans began the celebration of the New Year by seeking forgiveness from their enemies. The Romans also named the first month of the year after Janus, the god of beginnings and the guardian of doors and entrances. Historians report that the mythical Roman King Janus had the ability to look back on the past and look forward to the future with two faces, one on the front of his head and one on the back. For this reason, at midnight on December 31, the Romans imagined Janus looking back at the old year and forward to the new.

Global Phenomenon

New Year's is a time of new beginnings for people around the world. In the United States, one New Year's tradition began with a kiss at the stroke of midnight. This long-standing tradition came from historical masked balls, symbolizing evil spirits from the old year and the kiss being a sign of purification for the New Year. The more common United States tradition includes waiting until countdown the night before and toasting the New Year or watching a fireworks display.

Other traditions include eating black-eyed peas if you're from the south. Consuming

black-eyed peas has been considered to bring good luck for the coming year. Some Southerners have been rumored to eat one pea for each day of the year to ensure good fortune. Cabbage is another "good luck" vegetable and often considered a sign of prosperity and is consumed on New Year's Day by many. A traditional Chinese symbol of good luck and happiness comes from painting the front door with a fresh coat of red paint. In Spain, when the clock strikes midnight, people eat 12 grapes, one with every toll to bring good luck for the 12 months ahead. In Greece, a special New Year's bread is baked with a coin buried inside. If the third slice, which is traditionally a celebratory slice for the house, contains the coin, it is thought that spring will come early that year. Haitians celebrate New Year's Day by wearing new clothing and exchanging gifts in the hope that it will bring good luck for the coming year.

Other cultures used cymbals and fireworks that included rituals to chase away the ghosts of the past and may include ceremonies that involve bonfires, and parades with masks symbolizing the dead.

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6 Smile Resolutions

Whatever the New Year's tradition, making resolutions is consistent with closing the door on the past year and looking ahead to peace and prosperity. Celebrate the New Year by starting a resolution to maintain or improve dental health for you and your family.

1. **Resolve to brush your teeth at least twice a day with fluoride toothpaste.**

Learning proper brushing techniques is an essential part of maintaining good oral health and preventing gum disease. Daily brushing helps remove decay-causing plaque from tooth surfaces. Fluoride reduces tooth decay and prevents cavities. Parents and caregivers of children should follow the directions on the label of fluoride toothpaste that has the ADA Seal of Acceptance. Parents and caregivers should consult a dentist or health-care provider before introducing a child under two years old to fluoride toothpaste. For children under the age of six who use fluoride toothpaste, place no more than a pea-sized amount of toothpaste on the toothbrush, help brush the child's teeth (recommended particularly for pre-school-aged children) or supervise the toothbrushing, and encourage the child to spit excess toothpaste into the sink to minimize the amount swallowed. Indiscriminate use can result in inadvertent swallowing of more fluoride than is recommended.

2. **Resolve to floss daily.**

Flossing cleans areas between the teeth where the toothbrush can't reach. Dental floss should be used to floss between teeth at least once a day for two-three minutes. It is important to floss between all teeth in the mouth. Start in the same place each time and work around the mouth. For children, flossing should begin when there are two teeth in the mouth that touch together. Parents can help floss children's teeth until they are able to floss by themselves.

3. **Resolve to eat a nutritious and healthy diet.**

Good nutrition plays an important role in dental health. Eating an orally healthy diet should include a variety of foods from the five main food groups, and limit in-between snacks. Continuous contact with foods and beverages that are high in sugar can negatively affect the teeth and gums. Make a resolution to cut down on the number of sugary drinks and sticky, sugary snacks. Instead, offer your children water and fruits and vegetables for snacks. Also, offer water to your children to drink after meals to help cleanse the teeth.

4. **Resolve to throw away old toothbrushes and replace them with new ones.**

It is recommended that a toothbrush be replaced when the bristles bend or look worn-about every three to four months or after an illness. Children's brushes may have to be replaced more often. Start the New Year with a new toothbrush.

5. **Resolve to visit the dentist regularly.**

Regular dental visits are important to overall dental health. Be sure to tell your dentist about any medications (new or existing) that you or your children are taking. The American Dental Association (ADA) recommends that a child be seen by a dentist as soon as his/her first tooth erupts, but no later than the child's first birthday.

6. **Resolve not to use any tobacco products.**

Tobacco in any form can increase the risk of oral cancer. Smokeless tobacco is no safer than cigarettes. Be a good role model to your children and talk to your children about the bad effects of tobacco use. If you use any tobacco products, make a resolution to eliminate these harmful substances.

Start off the New Year with healthy resolutions that will make you smile and create healthy dental habits that can last a lifetime for you and your children.