

# POINTERS FOR PARENTS

## Ten Ways To Ensure A Healthy, Beautiful Smile For Your Child

(NAPSA)—Straight teeth, properly aligned jaws and an overall positive self-image—that's what close to six million children and adults in the United States and Canada are currently pursuing through orthodontic treatment provided by members of the American Association of Orthodontists (AAO). The AAO is committed to providing education on the lifelong benefits of orthodontic treatment and care.

This October marks the 10th year of National Orthodontic Health Month, the AAO's U.S. and Canadian orthodontic health education program. In honor of its 10th anniversary, and as part of its commitment to education, the AAO is providing parents with a list of 10 things to keep in mind when asking the question: "How can I ensure a healthy smile for my child?"

**1. Maintain Regular Dentist Visits**—According to the American Dental Association, a child should have the first dental visit no later than the first birthday. Upon completion of that first checkup, regular visits should occur every six months.

**2. See an Orthodontist No Later Than Age Seven**—The AAO recommends that all children have a checkup with an orthodontic specialist no later than age seven. Even with several baby teeth present at age seven, an orthodontist can detect problems that may need treatment early or in the future.

**3. Watch for Signs of Trouble**—Parents should watch for problems such as early or late loss of baby teeth, difficulty in chewing or biting, or mouth breathing as



**If your child wears braces, orthodontists and dentists recommend brushing after every meal.**

their child grows. If a child exhibits one of these signs, a checkup with an orthodontic specialist should be scheduled.

**4. Brushing and Flossing are Key**—To ensure proper dental health care, it's important to get children on a consistent schedule of brushing and flossing their teeth. Orthodontists and dentists recommend children brush after every meal and floss daily.

**5. Uphold a Healthy Diet**—Although the occasional sweet or soda pop is okay for children, orthodontists and dentists urge parents to control their frequency and serving size. High intakes of sugary items such as candy and soda pop are the number-one cause of cavities.

**6. Put an End to Bad Oral Habits**—Make sure thumb and pacifier sucking are discontinued between the ages of two and four. If either is prolonged, the habit may cause problems with proper growth of the jaws and with tooth

alignment. It can also adversely affect the appearance of the child's face.

**7. Observe for Tooth Decay**—Parents should take a role of monitoring the growth and appearance of the face and teeth, especially if they don't frequent the dentist. If there is concern about facial balance or tooth discoloration, they should seek professional advice from an orthodontist or dentist. Fluorides and cavity-preventing "sealants" should be used as a means to prevent tooth decay.

**8. Take Care of Braces**—For children who are currently in orthodontic treatment, make sure to avoid foods that are hard, sticky, chewy or crunchy. These foods may harm braces and potentially prolong treatment time.

**9. Guard Teeth While Playing Sports**—An easy precaution parents can take to ensure the protection of their child's smile is to make sure their child wears a mouth guard when participating in sports. This can protect from fracturing or knocking out teeth.

**10. Be Cautious of Quick-Fix Solutions**—Masking an orthodontic problem with quick solutions like veneers or bonding may lead to long-term dental problems such as tooth decay and loss. Consult with your orthodontic specialist before choosing this method.

Parents interested in additional information on orthodontic treatment can find out more information or obtain a free video, "A Smile That's Good for Life," by calling the AAO's toll-free information line 1-800-STRAIGHT (1-800-787-2444) or by visiting [www.braces.org](http://www.braces.org).

