

## April is Oral Health Month

**By Sarah Sobanski**

Were you one of those kids who never made the "smile" wall?

My childhood dental clinic pulled out all the stops when it came to toothy stereotypes. A giant smiling tooth holding a toothbrush as a mascot. Receptionists with perfect pearly whites. Patients cringing in the waiting room as distant screams drowned out the buzz of drills coming to life.

Every time we went, my mom would herd me into the bathroom first. She'd hand me a toothbrush and toothpaste and tell me to brush before seeing the dentist.

As I dug my heels in - because I couldn't fathom why I had to clean my teeth before someone else cleaned my teeth - Mom would push me by the "smile" wall or the "wall of shame," as I affectionately came to call it.

On this wall were all the kids from the neighbourhood who had attended the dentist and walked away cavity-free.

I began to imagine that when you made it up on the smile wall there was a grand celebration. All the dental hygienists and dentists applauded you and you got to drink all the sugary soda and sweets you wanted forever. Because I never made it.

Every appointment I would march to the dentist's chair with determination. And, every appointment, I would have to avoid the wall as I made my way back to my mom, defeated.

Don't be that kid ? or don't let your kids be that kid. I'm still traumatized by visions of some 30-odd children laughing at me from their tiny polarized photo pedestals - including the girl that was always tallest in class by a hair's breadth over me. What madness she wrought!

I can't be the only one. But whether you feel my pain, or if you were one of the lucky ones on the smile wall growing up, it's important that we strive to leave good examples for the next generation of dental champions. Like the ones at my local, [Dentist Silver Springs](#). :)

Hastings and Prince Edward Public Health announced earlier this month that health units across the province are partnering with the Ontario Association of Public Health Dentistry to make April Oral Health Month. The awareness campaign, Brush Up on the Facts: Keep Kids' Teeth Healthy, promotes the importance of healthy habits for your mouth at all ages - the difference between having 32 bones in your head and just being a bone head. It's also raising awareness of the free dental programs and services available for some children in the county.

According to the announcement, "good oral health is important for a child's self-esteem, sense of well-being and overall health."

It isn't just about making the smile wall. Public health says, "Cavities can be painful, impact a child's ability to chew foods properly and may affect their ability to pay attention at school or enjoy daily activities."

When was the last time you thought about how much sugar you're ingesting? Are you leading by example? We all know sugary snacks can be bad for our waistlines, but we should also consider how they impact our bodies in other ways. Your belly can expand and shrink. However, as any [Dentist in Naples](#) will admit, you can only grow your teeth back once. Consequently, caring for your oral health is fundamental.

Public health recommends taking "small steps... to help prevent dental issues such as limiting sugary snacks and drinks, helping children brush and floss properly and visiting a dental professional regularly, like at [Dentist Hampton](#)."

If visiting getting to the dentist regularly isn't in your budget, **free oral health clinics** are available through public health for children up until they're 17.

Your child might also be eligible for regular visits to a licensed dentist including check-ups, cleanings, fillings, X-rays, scaling and essential or emergency oral health issues through the **Healthy Smiles Ontario Program**.

If you don't currently have a dentist for your child, then you can visit <https://www.opencare.com/> to find a local dentist who's perfect for you and your child.

Public health recommends visiting **here** for more about the awareness campaign and tips on how to teach your kids healthy mouth habits. It also suggests calling its offices at 613-966-5500 for more on its dental clinics and programs.

It's lucky we have our baby teeth to ruin before our adult teeth. They're good practice.