

## Sticky Foods...

I recently received an email from a concerned parent (Thanks!) concerning the breakfasts served in our school cafeterias. Before we get started, please let me get one thing straight. I have nothing but respect and admiration for the teachers, coaches, staff, and administrators that keep our schools running and our kids educated. They are mostly overworked and grossly underpaid for the responsibilities they assume in educating and caring for our kids. I do not have any kids in school yet, but my thanks goes out to all of those that taught me and will teach mine in the future. In one way or another, we all owe you a little piece of who we have become.

Back to the subject at hand, it seems our kids are given choices at school as to what they can eat at breakfast and lunch. What do we think they are...young adults? Either that or they just pick and choose off of their plate the things that look best. You can lead a kid to broccoli, but you can't make him eat. The problem is that nine times out of ten; your kid and mine are going to choose the sugary, sticky cereal over the fresh fruit slices. Why? Off the top of my head I can think of two quick answers: it tastes better and "that's what the cool kids do."

Okay, so a kiddo has some milk and sticky, pink cereal for breakfast. How does that affect their teeth? We have bacteria all over our mouths that tend to hide and form little bacterial cities in any nook or cranny they can find. That sweet, sticky cereal tends to stick and stay in the grooves of our teeth, long after breakfast is over. This is a virtual smorgasbord for those bacteria, which eat our leftovers and poop them out back onto our teeth. Their poop is acid and it dissolves holes in teeth. Those holes are called cavities and will need to be addressed before they dig straight into the nerve and really cause a problem. Hopefully, by now, you can see this parent's concern.

I'm a firm believer that one should not complain without a valid solution in mind. I also believe that it is our responsibility to take care of ourselves and our kids, not some institution or bureaucracy. In other words, we are not going to keep our kids from eating cavity causing foods, therefore, let us minimize the damage. Here are a few suggestions, for kids from five to fifty, to help keep you out of the dental chair.

Brush after every meal with a fluoride toothpaste. This may not always be possible, but it would definitely help.

If you cannot brush, rinse thoroughly with water. Water will not remove all of the sticky food, but it will help. It will also help neutralize the acid that dissolves teeth and causes cavities.

If you drink a soft drink, sugared tea, or milk, drink it over a short period of time with a meal and rinse with water afterward. Last time I looked, most schools have an abundance of water fountains.

Chew sugar free gum. I don't know what, if any, schools this is allowed in, but it helps prevent cavities. Even better if the gum is sweetened with xylitol.

Back in the day, my old high school cafeteria had several options for lunch. For some reason, the cool thing we ate was a chili-cheese burrito. Being ever so health conscious, I paired my daily burrito with a carton of whole milk. Even in braces, I did not brush after lunch, unless my next class was with Amy Taylor, but that's a whole other story. I'm not sure how this dentist didn't rot his teeth at the time. We cannot make our kid's choices, we can only help guide the way.

Until next time, keep smiling.

\_Questions or comments can be sent to Drs. Parrish at [ParrishDental@aol.com](mailto:ParrishDental@aol.com).