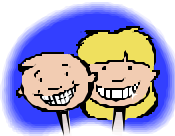


# Tooth Decay May Affect a Child's Quality of Life

Poor dental health due to improper feeding may be a major cause of slowed growth in young children. Intervention and treatment gives children the chance to grow at normal, healthy rates. In addition, recent research highlights how children with cavities in their early childhood years tend to experience tooth decay again in later years in both primary and permanent teeth.

Recent research reports that children with dental decay may exhibit symptoms that affect their quality of life. Loss of appetite, inability to finish a meal, loss of sleep, and negative behavior patterns all improved in children after dental treatment.

## Signs and Symptom of Dental Problems in School-Age Children



Poor dental health is the most prevalent health problem in the United States, afflicting 90-95% of Americans. School-age children are not exempt from these problems. Many outward signs may be present that can lead school personnel to detect oral health needs of the children in their care.

A swollen cheek, neck or the underside of the chin may be indicative of a tooth that has abscessed and is creating a swelling in the affected area. The school nurse or teacher may be able to confirm the presence of tooth decay with a simple look in the child's mouth. An infected tooth causing these symptoms would show obvious signs of decay, and a referral to a dentist would be important.

Children who are in pain due to dental problems may be unable to eat foods that are hard, hot, or cold. Children who are observed to routinely pick at these types of food in the lunchroom should be suspected. Unusual weight loss may also be a sign of the inability to eat properly due to teeth that may be broken or decayed. Ask the child if they have a toothache. Besides observing decay, a "bubble" located on the gum above or below the affected tooth may also indicate an abscessed tooth.

Poor concentration in school may relate to the lack of a good breakfast but also may indicate dental problems. Research has shown that dental problems cause students to be less attentive in class, and may also affect overall health. If a child's mouth hurts, or if they are unable to sleep well at night it may be evident the next day in the classroom. Learning if the child has a toothache may help to determine the reason for a child's lack of attentiveness.

Teachers and school staff should be aware of the above signs and symptoms of dental problems, in order to advocate for the child with dental needs. When oral health problems are suspected, the parents of the child should be advised of the effects of tooth decay on the child's performance in school. The school nurse may be able to assist the family in seeking dental help, and may be able to provide follow-up on dental care.

