

## Healthy Gift Ideas:

*A toothbrush, dental floss, and sugar-free gum*

Since the consumption of grandma's cookies and candies is inevitable and may be hard on everyone's teeth this holiday season, Northeast Delta Dental recommends stuffing your loved one's stocking with gifts that combat tooth decay – like a toothbrush, dental floss, and sugar-free gum.

“Long-term, eating foods that are high in sugar, without proper oral care, could result in tooth decay and cavities,” says Shannon Mills, DDS, vice president, professional relations and science, Northeast Delta Dental. “Give a gift that will keep healthy teeth and gums top-of-mind during the holidays.”

If not removed by brushing or other means, sugars in the mouth can contribute to tooth decay. Naturally occurring bacteria in the mouth form a colorless, sticky film called plaque. Cavity-causing organisms within plaque feed on sugar and turn it into acid, which attacks tooth enamel and leads to tooth decay.

“But proper brushing, flossing, and chewing sugar-free gum are easy ways to fight tooth decay,” says Mills.

That's why Northeast Delta Dental recommends the following stocking stuffers to promote oral health this holiday season.

**A Toothbrush** – Brushing your teeth with fluoride toothpaste is an effective strategy. Removing plaque left by holiday sweets at least twice a day will help prevent tooth decay and gum disease.

An alternative to the conventional toothbrush is the electric toothbrush, which, some argue, more effectively removes plaque. Electric toothbrushes come with vibrating, oscillating, or sonic brush heads; and the basic models are relatively inexpensive.



Besides brush type, you also have a choice of bristle type. Hard bristle toothbrushes were once recommended but have since been shown to be too abrasive to the teeth and gums. Give a toothbrush with a soft, rounded-end nylon bristles.

**Dental Floss** – While a toothbrush is effective in cleaning tooth surfaces, the bristles cannot adequately clean between the teeth. Dental floss will help remove holiday fare from those hard-to-reach areas.

There are many types of dental floss to choose from – unwaxed or waxed, flavored or unflavored, and regular or wide. Waxed floss may be easier to slide through tight teeth or restoration contacts, while unwaxed floss will spread out its fibers during use for greater tooth contact. Give holiday-flavored floss, like cinnamon.

**Sugar-Free Gum** – Acids in the mouth have a potentially detrimental effect on tooth enamel. Many studies have shown that chewing sugar-free gum after meals and snacks helps reduce the acid level, especially at times when brushing is impractical.

Give gum that includes xylitol, an artificial sweetener believed to reduce the incidence of cavities.

**Northeast Delta Dental**

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