

October 2021

## Oral Wellness Newsletter

*Hello everyone! Here's our October newsletter. The content is easy to share - just use the "forward this email" button. Or highlight the text you want, then copy and paste it wherever you like. It's that simple.*



### Dental treatment for sleep apnea

Though the main treatment for obstructive sleep apnea is CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) therapy, there may be an alternative that could work for you.

With obstructive sleep apnea, your airway becomes blocked during sleep, causing your breathing to stop many times throughout the night. A CPAP machine pumps air into your windpipe to help keep it open.

But some folks can't tolerate wearing the CPAP face mask. And people with mild sleep apnea may not need CPAP machines. In those instances, an oral appliance similar to a mouth guard may be the way to go.

#### How oral appliance therapy works

If you decide to try oral appliance therapy, your doctor will write a prescription for a custom-made device. You'll also be referred to a dentist specially trained in sleep medicine. The dentist will work hand in hand with your doctor throughout your treatment.

There are two types of oral appliances. One fits over your teeth and brings your jaw forward so your airway stays open. The second kind keeps your tongue from falling backwards and blocking your throat. The dentist will decide which is best for you and track your progress to make sure your device is working comfortably.

#### Does dental insurance cover it?

Oral appliance therapy is typically covered by health insurance because it's designed to treat a medical problem, not a dental one.

Most health plans consider oral appliances as medical equipment, so reimbursement is usually under coverage for Durable Medical Equipment (DME). But make sure to check with your plan's customer service department to find out about your specific benefits. You can also ask your doctor for a predetermination first to find out what costs you may be responsible to pay.

[Watch a video on oral appliance therapy](#)



## Is it too early for an orthodontist?

Believe it or not, the right time to make the first orthodontist appointment is when your child still has baby teeth! The American Academy of Orthodontics recommends that kids get a checkup by age 7 – and earlier if your dentist suspects a problem.

By 7, your child has enough adult teeth to tell if the mouth and jaw are developing normally. If not, the orthodontist can advise which treatment will work best in your child's case.

In order to get braces, kids need most of their permanent teeth. So treatment with braces usually starts between the ages of 8 and 14.\* For younger kids, orthodontists may recommend what's called an "interceptive" approach. It's a two-step plan where other "appliances" are used first to help guide the growth of face and jaw bones.

### Types of dental appliances

- **Palatal expander** – Helps widen the upper jaw to make room for incoming teeth
- **Nance button** – Holds a space open if a baby tooth is lost too early
- **Headgear** – Straps around the back of the head to help with overbites and underbites
- **Twin block** – Helps make sure the lower jaw grows correctly

The second phase of treatment with braces usually begins once a child has mostly adult teeth. Some orthodontists believe that kids who have worn dental appliances need braces for a shorter time.

Lots of things can cause your child to need treatment early. Here are some signs to look for:

- Thumb or finger-sucking

- Baby teeth that come in early, late or fall out irregularly
- Crowded teeth
- Teeth that meet incorrectly
- Breathing through the mouth
- Teeth and jaws that look too small or too big

If your child is experiencing any of these issues, talk to your dentist. He or she can likely recommend a good orthodontist. Or use our online [Find a Dentist tool](#) to search for in-network orthodontists near you.

### [Learn about different orthodontic treatments](#)

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\*mayoclinic.org; [Dental Braces – When to Start](#); Accessed Sept. 13, 2021.

\*\*stanfordchildrens.org; [How to Tell if your Child Needs Braces](#); Accessed Sept. 13, 2021.

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## Meet our dental hygienists

It's National Dental Hygiene Month, so we are celebrating the important role of a dental hygienist! Just like nurses help doctors, dental hygienists work alongside dentists, helping to care for patients. Dental hygienists have earned specialized degrees and are licensed and registered in the state they work. They're oral health professionals trained to do more than just polish your pearly whites. In many states, dental hygienists also:

- Screen for signs of cavities, gum disease and oral cancer
- Assist the dentist in numbing the tooth or mouth
- Take X-rays and impressions of teeth for oral appliances
- Educate on oral hygiene, cavity prevention, smoking cessation and proper nutrition
- Perform non-surgical treatments for gum disease such as scaling and root planing

- Apply fluoride and sealants

At United Concordia Dental, we have two dental hygienists on staff, who serve as our oral wellness consultants. Unique to our company, Valerie Fleming, RDH and Holley Kirkland, RDH serve as the human link between dental insurance and members' daily lives. They provide education and wellness initiatives that show that making smart dental choices contributes to a healthy mouth, a healthy body and a healthier life.

### **Get to know Val**

Valerie Fleming has been a senior oral wellness consultant with United Concordia Dental since 2019. During her career, she has worked as a dental hygienist at various practices and has experience in oral health consulting/sales and marketing and educational consulting. She currently lives near Pittsburgh, PA.

**Why did you first become a dental hygienist?** When I was a child, we didn't go to the dentist, and believe it or not, I wanted to go! I always admired people with a beautiful smile, and I thought going into the dental field was the best way to achieve that.

**What do you enjoy most about being a consultant?** I love educating people on the value of oral health and the value of a smile, not just for the camera but for mental health, systemic health and total wellness.

**What do you do in your spare time?** Family time and creating memories is very important to me. We love to travel and are pretty adventurous!

**What are you reading and/or watching?** I'm reading *The Silent Patient* by Alex Michaelides.

**FUN FACT:** My family has participated in several Tough Mudder endurance events together. "These 10-mile races with obstacles are held across the country and center around teamwork and stepping outside your comfort zone. "Engaging in these events has strengthened our family connection and reminds us that the journey is more important than the destination."

### **Get to know Holley**

Our newest oral wellness consultant, Holley Kirkland, joined United Concordia Dental earlier this year. She has been a licensed Registered Dental Hygienist for 26 years. She also has experience in dental sales and consulting and public speaking on wellness and leadership. Holley currently lives in Jacksonville, FL.

**Why did you first become a dental hygienist?** I have enjoyed being a dental hygienist, mainly because I can see the difference I make in people's lives as a whole—not just with their oral health but their overall health and well-being.

**What do you enjoy most about being a consultant?** I love the diversity and collaboration that goes along with being a consultant. I get to use my experience and knowledge from my clinical dental career, and life in general, to educate and help people in new and creative ways.

**What do you do in your spare time?** I am a complete garden girl and love plants and flowers! I also love to travel and visit new places. I have a passion for the ocean and love to deep sea fish. I try to fish at every place I travel, whether in my home state of Florida or somewhere exotic like Costa Rica or the Dominican Republic! Every year, for the past 10 years, I have rung in the New Year someplace I have never been before.

**What are you reading and/or watching?** I just started to read *The Confident Woman* by Anabel Gillham.

**FUN FACT:** Holley owned and ran a guest ranch in Wyoming for more than five years. “I found out I am not a cowgirl, so I’m back in my home state of Florida and near my beloved ocean again!”



## Cut back on Halloween candy

It's here, it's here! For those sitting on the edge of their seat waiting pumpkin spice lattes, donuts, muffins—well, pumpkin spice EVERYTHING—the time has arrived. The downside is that most of these treats contain lots of sugar. We can all indulge a little, but remember to brush your teeth after eating these delicious fall delicacies and Halloween candy.

With the enormous amount of candy given out at this time of year, consider giving your trick-or-treaters something different this year! Here are some alternative Halloween treats to share.

- **Organic Juice Boxes:** Kids are thirsty creatures, and juice boxes travel well. They make for a smart treat to pass out to the children in your neighborhood.
- **Craft Supplies:** Consider handing out treats such as stickers, stamps, mini-coloring books, markers or anything else that allows them some creative playtime. You can usually buy these items in bulk.
- **Hot Cocoa Packets:** Who wouldn't love to return home from a night of roaming the neighborhood to a cup of warm apple cider or hot chocolate? For bonus points, glue googly eyes on the packets or dress them up like mummies with tissue paper.
- **Toothbrushes:** You may not win over the children on this one, but parents will love you for it. Choose bright colors or character-themed toothbrushes.

If your kids bring home a bag of candy, try to monitor how much they eat and limit their daily consumption to a couple of pieces. Remember that hard candy and sticky staples like taffy and caramel expose the teeth to sugar for longer periods of time! Encouraging your child to drink water after they eat treats will help rinse away sugar.



## Baked pumpkin oatmeal

Serves 4

It's pumpkin season! Can you think of a better way to start a cozy fall day than with a warm bowl of baked pumpkin oatmeal?

Pumpkin is loaded with vitamins and minerals that are great for boosting your immune system, which is especially important as the weather gets colder.<sup>[1]</sup> Oats are a great source of carbs, fiber, protein and fat. They've been shown to help with gut health, blood sugar control and weight loss.<sup>[2]</sup>

Enjoy this delish and heart-healthy breakfast!

### [Get the recipe](#)

#### Ingredients:

2 cups old-fashioned rolled oats, uncooked (not quick cooking)  
¼ cup brown sugar substitute  
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon  
1/8 teaspoon ground nutmeg  
1 teaspoon baking powder  
1 cup fat-free milk  
1 teaspoon vanilla extract  
1 cup pureed pumpkin  
1 tablespoon canola oil  
1 egg, beaten  
Non-stick cooking spray

#### Directions:

Preheat oven to 375° F. Spray a 1.5-quart baking dish with cooking spray.

In a large bowl, combine oats, brown sugar substitute, cinnamon, nutmeg and baking powder.

In a medium bowl, combine the milk, vanilla extract, pumpkin, oil and egg.

Add the pumpkin mixture to the oat mixture; stir well. Pour oat mixture into dish and bake for 20 minutes. Serve warm.

#### *Nutrition info per serving*

295 calories | 8g fat | 48g carbs | 10g protein | 410mg potassium

Brought to you by [Diabetes Food Hub](#)

[1] 9 Impressive Health Benefits of Pumpkin; [Healthline](#); August 28, 2018.

[2] 9 Health Benefits of Eating Oats and Oatmeal; [Healthline](#); July 19, 2016.

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