

### To Keep Your Child's Teeth Healthy, Start Before Age One by Rick Spencer

**O**n her first visit to the dentist's office, Ivy Gray, a precocious 6-year-old, told Katherine Southwell, DDS, "I won't let you see my teeth until you show me yours."

Obviously, Ivy wanted to make sure her dentist was a role model for good oral health. After close inspection, Ivy was impressed.

Ivy and her mother, Tara Meighan, are new patients at the Main Street Physicians Dental Center. The Center is operated by the Peninsula Institute for Community Health and is funded by the Obici Healthcare Foundation. Tara appreciated the friendly service and the affordable cost for dental care.

"Making routine dental visits is not just for adults or children with their permanent teeth," said Dr. Southwell. She emphasized the need for children to start getting dental checkups by their first birthday. Ivy stopped by the office to have her teeth cleaned and a cavity filled in a baby tooth.

"Bringing your children to the dentist regularly lets us check for any cavities or other tooth problems; this practice allows dental providers to address those problems while cavities are still small," she said.

"Large cavities in baby teeth can create difficulty with chewing and speaking and lower self esteem. Also, untreated cavities can cause infections (abscesses) that can be harmful to a child's overall health. If cavities

become so large that baby teeth are lost prematurely, it can cause adult teeth to come in crooked," commented Dr. Southwell.

"Making sure children receive an adequate amount of fluoride and have sealants applied as soon as the adult teeth come in (about age 6) are other ways to pursue good oral health," she added.

"Having a good smile says a lot about how you feel about yourself, because it reflects how you feel on the inside," Tara said.

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ALL SMILES - Katherine Southwell, DDS (left) welcomes Ivy Gray (seated) and her mother, Tara Meighan, to their second dental visit at the Main Street Physician Dental Center.

### Simple Tips for Healthy Teeth, No Matter Your Age!

According to Dr. Katherine Southwell, children and adults should follow these guidelines to achieve optimum oral health:

- Participate in regular dental checkups, even if no problems are present.
- Limit sugary drinks such as juice, soda and sports drinks. Drink more water.
- Make sure children only have water in sippy cups at bedtime. Even milk can cause cavities if a child goes to bed with it.
- Brush twice daily. Baby teeth should be brushed a soft washcloth or toothbrush; children and adults with a soft toothbrush.
- Ask the dentist if children should use toothpaste with fluoride in it.

Dr. Southwell is the dentist at Main Street Physicians, 157 North Main Street, Suffolk, Virginia.

## Good Oral Health Improves Overall Health by Jeffrey Forman, MD

There is an undeniable and frequently underestimated link between oral health and overall health. Research demonstrates that poor oral health can have adverse effects on ailments such as diabetes, heart disease and osteoporosis, and the health of newborns and infants.

According to the American Diabetes Association, “People with diabetes are at an increased risk for serious gum disease because they are generally more susceptible to bacterial infection and have a decreased ability to fight bacteria that invade the gums.” Gum disease, similar to other infections, may cause blood glucose levels to rise, making it more difficult to control diabetes.

A study published in the Journal of Periodontology (2011) suggests that “periodontal disease may increase the risk for respiratory infections, such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and pneumonia. These infections, which are caused when bacteria from the upper throat are inhaled into the lower respiratory tract, can be severely debilitating and are one of the leading causes of death in the U.S.”

Gum diseases can double a person’s chance of developing heart disease. Research suggests that oral bacteria can get into the bloodstream, attach to fat cells in blood vessels, form blood clots and restrict blood flow. There is also a connection between high levels of oral bacteria and thickening blood vessels.

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Additional research shows a correlation between oral infections and the increased risk of pre-term and low-birth weight deliveries. For pregnant women, gum disease may increase the mother’s risk of diabetes and high blood pressure. Additionally, the nausea and vomiting

associated with pregnancy can deteriorate tooth enamel.

But pregnant mothers aren’t the only people impacted by oral health concerns. “Infants are not immune from cavities. Few people are aware that the bacteria that cause cavities can be transferred to infants easily,” said Sarah Bedard Holland, Virginia Oral Health Coalition (VaOHC) Executive Director.

The intimate relationship of dental and overall health must compel patients, physicians and dentists to collaborate, recognize problems early and communicate with one another on ways to improve health outcomes. If you would like more information about oral health and how it relates to overall health, check out the Virginia Oral Health Coalition’s website at [www.vaoralhealth.org](http://www.vaoralhealth.org).



Dr. Forman is a member of the Obici Healthcare Foundation Board of Directors.

## Dental Access Points in Western Tidewater

To find a list of dental clinics in Hampton Roads, visit [www.accesspartnership.org](http://www.accesspartnership.org). For assistance finding dental services, call Access Partnership’s Dental Access Line at (757) 853-8500 ext. 127.

The following is a listing of dental programs in Western Tidewater:

- **Horizon Health Services, Inc. Ivor Family Dental Center**  
HOURS: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.  
8575 Ivor Road  
Ivor, VA 23866  
757-859-9070
- **Peninsula Institute for Community Health Main Street Physicians**  
HOURS: Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.  
157 North Main Street, Suite A  
Suffolk, VA 23434  
757-925-1866
- **Western Tidewater Free Clinic**  
Dental Services for Free Clinic medical patients only  
2019 Meade Parkway  
Suffolk, VA 23434  
757-923-1060

## UNINSURED OBTAIN FREE DENTAL CARE



Nearly 240 people without dental insurance received free oral health services during two Pankey Dental Access Day events conducted in December and May at the Suffolk National Guard Armory.

These opportunities to provide care to the underserved were sponsored by Access Partnership and the Obici Healthcare Foundation.

“As the result of this community-wide collaboration of volunteers and businesses, patients received over \$290,000 worth of dental care,” said Gina Pitrone, Foundation Executive Director.