**Structured lifestyle helps prevent dental caries in children**

A structured lifestyle, including a healthy breakfast, provides regularity and helps to prevent dental caries in children. (wavebreakmedia/Shutterstock)

By Dental Tribune MEA

EIDEN, Netherlands: Dental caries is one of the most common chronic childhood diseases worldwide and can affect a child’s quality of life significantly. Several studies have identified a correlation between caries and lifestyle factors, such as physical activity and meal frequency. A team of researchers has now found that, especially for younger age groups, regularity and a structured lifestyle are very important for preventing caries.

The researchers at the Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research examined the impact of such factors on caries experience at different ages. They based their study on the data collected in a previous study on oral health in children and adolescents in the Netherlands that aimed to describe the oral health status and the preventive dental behaviours of 9-, 15- and 21-year-olds.

The scientists used the existing data, collected through questionnaires and clinical oral examinations, to study the probability of caries and the degree of caries experience in relation to several lifestyle factors. The lifestyle factors included were the frequency of toothbrushing per day, the frequency of having breakfast per week, and the frequency of food and drink consumption per day.

The 21-year-olds examined in the study did not show significant differences in caries experience in relation to the lifestyle factors studied. For the 9- and 15-year-olds, however, the lifestyle factors had a significant effect on their dental caries experience.

For the two younger age groups, not having breakfast and not brushing their teeth twice a day were associated with a significantly higher caries experience. In addition, consuming food or drinks more than seven times a day resulted in an increased caries experience for the 9-year-olds.

The findings of the study demonstrate that components that promote structure and regularity in a child’s life, such as having breakfast and the frequency of food and drink consumption per day, are essential to preventing caries.

According to the researchers, it would be helpful to include these lifestyle factors in programmes to prevent dental caries in children and to communicate preventive messages about the consumption of food and drinks between different health and oral health professionals.

The study, titled “Impact of lifestyle factors on caries experience in three different age groups: 9, 15, and 21-year-olds”, was published in the February issue of the Community Dentistry and Oral Epidemiology journal.