“ARE YOU NIBBLING AWAY YOUR OWN TEETH?”
A DENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION PROJECT
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Background and aims
Health surveys made by the Finnish Student Health Service (FSHS) in 2000 and 2004 showed that students are unaware of the amount of sugar in their diet; sugar-rich juices, soft drinks, sweets, and chocolate are consumed on a daily basis. In 2005, more than one half of male students brushed their teeth only once a day or less frequently.

In autumn 2009, the FSHS implemented a nationwide dental health promotion project to raise awareness of the effects of eating habits, especially snacking, on dental and oral health. Another aim was to reduce unhealthy snacking, emphasizing the meaning of regular meals and water as a thirst quencher.

Material and methods
The dental health promotion team designed a web-based test “Are you nibbling away your own teeth?”; it enables students to assess their risk of tooth decay and provides detailed guidance for dental care. An eating habit questionnaire was drawn up for use by dental health professionals during appointments. Two brochures were produced for distribution; one about the detrimental effects of snacking and the other about the acidic effects of different beverages. Campaign events were organized at all FSHS locations.

Results
In January 2010, feedback on the project was collected from students through a questionnaire. Of the 882 respondents, 330 (37.6%) knew of the project. The majority (74.5%) had learnt of it at various FSHS locations, and 25.5% through the website. Of the respondents, 15.5% had either viewed or done the web-based test. The possibilities to assess one’s own dental health (72.2%) and obtain individual self-care instructions (20.3%) were rated as its most interesting elements. In general, individual discussions during appointments (58.1%) and group sessions (41.7%) were most frequently rated as the best means of approaching issues related to dental health promotion. Written materials (40.5%) and website questionnaires (40.2%) emerged as the third best approach.