



## CARING FOR YOUR CHILDREN'S TEETH

Did you know that good dental health helps your child speak and eat properly and develop strong facial bones? In fact, good dental care is vital throughout the entire growing period — from before birth to the early 20s — so it is essential to teach good habits early.

If you are aware of a few simple facts, you can help your child get off to a healthy start.

### Before your baby is born

Because a child's teeth begin to form during the fifth week of pregnancy, dental care should begin as early as possible. An unborn baby's vitamins and minerals come from the mother's food, so expectant mothers can ensure healthy baby teeth by eating a balanced diet. Nutritional deficiencies of calcium, phosphorus and other vitamins and minerals can result in the abnormal growth of baby teeth, which may actually affect the development of permanent teeth in later years.

### Caring for an infant's teeth

Cleaning a child's teeth should begin when the first tooth is visible — at about age six months — because teeth are susceptible to decay as soon as they appear in the mouth. Wipe the baby's teeth and gums with a soft, damp washcloth or gauze pad.

A leading cause of tooth decay among young children is "baby bottle syndrome." When infants are allowed to drink from nursing bottles containing milk, formula or fruit juice, they often fall asleep with the bottle in their mouth, and the liquid may pool around the teeth. Acids formed by the juice or milk can attack the tooth enamel and may eventually cause irreparable damage to the baby teeth. If you give your child a bottle to take to bed, be sure it contains only water.

### Fluoride is key

Studies have shown that children who drink fluoridated water from birth have up to 65 percent fewer cavities, and by the time they become teenagers, many of them still have no tooth decay. If you live in a community without a fluoridated water supply, you can make sure your children get enough fluoride by taking tablets or drops or by having topical fluoride treatments applied at the dental office. Using a fluoride toothpaste and mouth rinse are also effective. Combined with regular, thorough brushing and flossing, fluoridated water can help keep your child's teeth strong and free of decay.

### A healthy diet

Children need a balanced diet to help their bodies — including teeth — develop.

Aside from fluoride, calcium is extremely important for strong teeth and to the structure of the face and jaws. Make sure your child drinks plenty of milk and eats other calcium-rich foods, such as yogurt and cheese, which have been shown to inhibit the effects of harmful acids. Discourage snacks that are high in sugar or starch and sticky foods, such as candy.

### Preventive care

Pay special attention to your child's teeth during the teen years, when almost all permanent teeth are in. For children under age 14, your dental benefits may include coverage for sealants, thin plastic coatings that protect the chewing surfaces of teeth from decay. Decay most often occurs during this time, due to dietary changes and inadequate dental hygiene. Children who play sports should wear mouthguards, available at sports stores or from your dentist.

### At-home care

Regular at-home preventive care — brushing and flossing after every meal — can help keep dental problems to a minimum. From age 2, children should begin to brush their own teeth with a parent's help. Use a small, soft brush with a pea-sized amount of toothpaste. After age 8, children can brush and floss alone, with an occasional check by an adult. With a parent's guidance and proper personal and professional care, children have a good foundation for maintaining healthy teeth.

### Visiting the dentist

The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry recommends bringing your child to the dentist before his or her first birthday, followed by visits every six months. To help your child maintain good dental health, make caring for his or her teeth a pleasant experience from the start. Turn visits to the dentist into fun outings by combining them with trips to the park, zoo, movies or a favorite lunch spot. Avoid using negative words such as "hurt" and "shot," and bring your child with you to the dentist's office, so that he or she becomes comfortable with the staff and atmosphere. Demonstrating a positive attitude toward dental hygiene is one of the best ways to give your child lifelong oral health.

### When do permanent teeth grow in?

#### Upper teeth

Central incisors: 7-8 yrs.

Lateral incisors: 8-9 yrs.

Cuspids: 11-12 yrs.

First bicuspid: 10-11 yrs.

Second bicuspid: 10-12 yrs.

First molars: 6-7 yrs.

Second molars: 2-13 yrs.

Third molars: 17-21 yrs.

#### Lower teeth

Third molars: 17-21 yrs.

Second molars: 11-13 yrs.

First molars: 6-7 yrs.

Second bicuspid: 11-12 yrs.

First bicuspid: 10-12 yrs.

Cuspids: 9-10 yrs.  
Lateral incisors 7-8 yrs.  
Central incisors 6-7 yrs.

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