

Parents Page

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FOR HEALTHY SMILES:



CHILDREN'S ORAL CARE

Take good care of your child's baby teeth. They do eventually fall out but until they do, baby teeth play an important role in helping your child bite and chew food, and speak clearly. Baby teeth also save space for the permanent teeth, and help guide them into place.

Even before your child gets his or her first tooth, you should wipe your child's gums with an infant gum massager, clean damp gauze or a washcloth. Once your child's teeth come in, brush them twice a day using a soft bristled toothbrush with water.

Underneath your child's baby teeth, the roots and position of the adult teeth are growing into place.

Research shows that children who develop cavities in their baby teeth are more likely to develop cavities as an adult, so be sure to get your child to a dentist for a checkup. It is important to keep your child's baby teeth clean, but once the permanent teeth start to come in you really need to make cleaning them a priority so their permanent teeth will last a lifetime.

Many of the same dental treatment and evaluation options that adults have are also available to kids. These include x-rays, dental sealants, orthodontic treatments and more.

UNDERSTANDING BRUSHING AND FLOSSING

Begin using toothpaste to brush your child's teeth when he or she is 2 years old. Be careful to use only a small dab of toothpaste (about the size of a grain of rice). Young children tend to swallow toothpaste when brushing rather than spitting it out. Introduce fluoride toothpaste when your child is old enough not to swallow it. As soon as two teeth touch each other, floss between them once a day. You can use regular floss or special plastic floss holders.

At some point, your child will want to brush his or her own teeth. It's fine to give them a turn. But afterwards, you should always brush your child's teeth a second time. Most children won't be able to brush their teeth well on their own until they are about 8 years old.

NUTRITION

While what your child eats is important for healthy teeth, how often a child eats is just as important. Frequent snacking can increase a child's risk for tooth decay.



Cavities can develop when sugar-containing foods are allowed to stay in the mouth and allowed to form plaque. Bacteria that live in the plaque on the teeth feast on sugar and bits of food. They create acid, which eats away at tooth enamel. Between meals or snacks, saliva washes away the acid. If your child is always eating, there may not be time for this acid to get washed away.

When most people think of sugar, they think of white sugar that is found in candy and baked goods. But all foods that contain carbohydrates will ultimately break down into sugars.

PLANNING

Permanent teeth need regular cleaning and flossing. Dentists recommend following this routine after every meal or snack. When you start to take care of your child's permanent teeth, you will need to brush and floss his teeth for him until he gets older. Use toothpaste and a toothbrush designed for children. A child's toothbrush has softer bristles that will not hurt your child's teeth and gums. Try using children's flossers with handles so that you can teach your child how to floss his own teeth.

When a child is about 6 years old their teeth will begin to come loose. Let your child wiggle the tooth until it falls out on its own. This will minimize the pain and bleeding associated with a lost tooth.

Be on the lookout for cavities. What and how frequently your kids snack can have a big impact on their oral health. There are a few tips for snacking and mealtime.

- Give your child healthy snack foods, such as fresh fruits, vegetables, nuts and cheese.
- Buy foods that are sugar-free or unsweetened.
- Serve sugary or starchy foods as part of a meal, rather than as a snack. Most children drink liquids during a meal. Encourage kids to drink water during and at the end of their meals to wash out any remnant sugar.
- Offer fewer snacks during the day.
- After your child snacks, make sure his or her teeth are brushed. If this is not possible, have your child rinse with water several times or let them chew sugar free gum after eating.
- When chewing gum, choose a xylitol-sweetened or sugar-free gum.



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