



Healthy teeth and good dental health habits start in the first years of life. Here are a few dental tips for the smallest members of your family to help them maintain healthy teeth and avoid cavities, gum disease and other dental health issues.



When do I start?

Oral care should begin soon after your baby's birth. Gums should be cleaned after each feeding. This is best accomplished by wiping the gums gently with a moist piece of gauze or soft cloth. You should begin brushing your child's teeth as soon as they appear. Insist on a good brush before bedtime.



How can I avoid baby bottle cavities?

Once your baby's teeth begin to appear, you need to take extra care that these new teeth do not develop cavities. One common way a baby can develop cavities is called "nursing bottle mouth" which is caused by extended nursing on milk, formula or juices especially at bedtime or naptime. You should not use a feeding bottle as a pacifier. If you must give your baby a bottle at bedtime or naptime, make sure it contains plain water.



Time to go to the dentist!

Children should visit the dentist by their first birthday. At the first visit, your dentist will examine your child's mouth for early signs of decay and other problems. The dentist will tell you many of the things you will need to know about helping your child grow up cavity-free.

Prepare your child for the first dental visit with fun, not fear!

You can make your child's first visit to the dentist enjoyable and positive. Tell your child in advance that someone will look at their teeth and clean them. Most dentists prefer that a parent be present for the examination for any child under the age of three. Some ask the parent to sit in the dental chair and hold the young patient in their lap during the first few examinations. It can also be helpful to take your younger children along for an older sibling's dental visit so that they can get accustomed to the office and the staff.



Sports and children's teeth

Children involved in sports need proper mouth protection to prevent mouth injuries such as teeth being knocked out. Your dentist can customize mouth guards for your child's needs.



What role does nutrition play in healthy dental development?

Healthy eating habits lead to healthy teeth. Many snacks that children eat can lead to the formation of cavities. Try to limit your child's snacks and choose nutritious foods such as vegetables, low-fat yogurt and low-fat cheeses. Encourage kids to drink water throughout the day (especially after eating sweets). It will help rinse sugar away from teeth until there is time for a proper brushing.



Is fluoride necessary?

Studies have shown that children who drink fluoridated water from birth have up to 65% fewer cavities. If you live in a community without fluoridated water supply, you can make sure your kids get their fluoride by using tablets, drops or gel and by having topical fluoride treatments applied at the dental office. Ask your dentist for advice.



Are x-rays of primary (baby) teeth necessary?

Although primary (baby) teeth are in your child's mouth for only a few years, it is very important that they are kept in the best health to ensure that the permanent teeth erupt normally. Your dentist may want to take x-rays to detect any unseen cavities that need to be filled, or to make sure the permanent teeth are forming below the gum's surface and are in good position.



What are dental sealants?

Today, most cavities occur on the chewing surface of the back teeth. Dental sealants provide specific protection against that kind of cavity. A dental sealant is a plastic material that is "painted" directly into the grooves of the chewing surfaces of the tooth. The sealant acts as a barrier to protect the enamel from plaque and acids and prevents the formation of cavities.

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