

The Daily Parent

A NEWSLETTER FOR WORKING PARENTS

KEEP THEM SMILING: Children's Dental Health

Did you know that one of the most common childhood diseases is tooth decay? More than half of American children have had at least one cavity by age 5. And, by the time an American child is 17 years old, on average, he has had eight cavities.

The good news is that you can help your child fight tooth decay. First, you can make sure your child follows the right eating and drinking habits, to prevent sugar build-up on teeth. Then, you can help your child care for her teeth.



and bacteria over time can contribute to gum disease and cause more problems.

There are many things you can do to help your child avoid cavities and other mouth-related problems. Healthy tooth care helps. Also, drinking water with fluoride, a chemical in most areas' drinking water, helps strengthen teeth.

How Do We Get Cavities?

When we eat, bacteria and food get on our teeth. If it isn't brushed off, it starts to form acid on teeth. Once this acid forms, it breaks down the surfaces of teeth. After a while, holes, or cavities, form. Then, the dentist has to fix it. In addition, build up of acid

Starting Out with Healthy Teeth

Every year, children's teeth go through different stages of development. Different practices help keep their teeth healthy as they age.

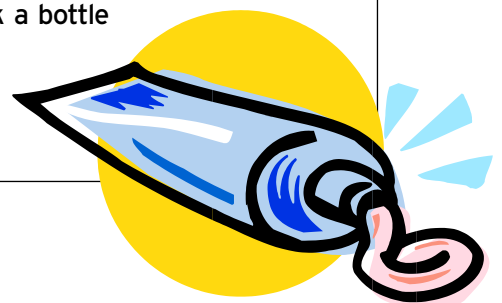
Infants:

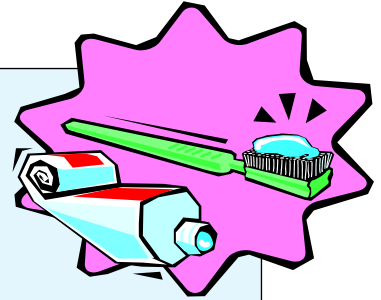
Facts: Your baby's teeth begin growing before he is even born—in the second trimester of pregnancy. By birth, babies have about 20 teeth, but they don't appear until the baby teethes, which usually begins sometime after they are 3 months old.

Eating and Drinking: Never let your baby drink a bottle of juice or milk while lying down to go to sleep. You can

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give the baby a bottle with water. Juice and milk may contribute to tooth decay, especially if it is just sitting in the mouth, and over time, can give your baby a case of "bottle mouth"—tooth decay caused by using the bottle too much.

Healthy Habits: Before teething, the best thing to do is to run a damp washcloth over your baby's teeth after eating. If your baby is teething, give her something clean to chew on—something big enough so that it won't be a choking hazard.

Once a tooth comes in, you may buy a soft infant toothbrush—but only use water, not toothpaste, to brush. Before your baby turns 2, you should bring him to a pediatric dentist for an exam—although the dentist won't do the same thing for the baby as for you, the dentist will examine your child's teeth and let you know what to do.

develop, children can lose their baby teeth before their grown-up teeth come in and this can cause problems with tooth spacing.

Eating and Drinking: Your child should eat nutritious foods. It's a good idea for children to avoid sugary and sticky foods. Sugary snacks between meals should be avoided as well.

Healthy Habits: Children should brush their teeth twice a day. They can use a soft-bristled brush with a pea-sized amount of toothpaste. The reason to use such a small amount is that children often actually swallow the toothpaste—and this amount won't hurt them.

You should take your toddler or preschooler to the dentist once every six months. Your dentist will watch out for cavities. She will also help you prevent tooth decay. For instance, if you live in an area where fluoride isn't added to the water, she may prescribe fluoride to strengthen your child's teeth.

Make sure you change your child's soft-bristled toothbrush every 6 months. Make it fun and let your child help choose his own toothbrush.

Quick Tip: If your toddler sucks his thumb, it's okay. Just tell your dentist if he continues to do it after age 4.

Healthy Tooth Foods

If your children aren't allergic to the following foods, these foods contain nutrients that strengthen teeth.

- | | |
|-----------------|----------|
| ▶ Vegetables | ▶ Yogurt |
| ▶ Peanut Butter | ▶ Milk |
| ▶ Cheese | |

Not-So-Healthy Tooth Foods

These foods contain sugar and other substances that can contribute to cavities.

- | | |
|---------------------------------|------------|
| ▶ Soda | ▶ Crackers |
| ▶ Bread | ▶ Pretzels |
| ▶ Candy (and other sugary food) | |

Toddler/Preschoolers:

Facts: Once your child has her baby teeth, you want to make sure she is keeping those teeth healthy and clean. If cavities

Toothbrush Tips

Sometimes, children don't want to brush their teeth. Here are a few tips on how to help them learn.

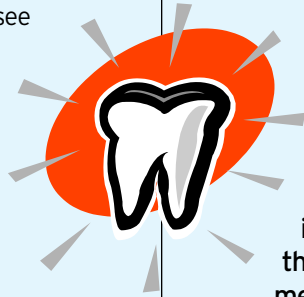


- ▶ Get a special step stool so she can see in the bathroom mirror.
- ▶ For rinse cups, choose a disposable brand with a fun logo or cartoon on the side.
- ▶ Let her choose a soft-bristled toothbrush with her favorite character from tv or a movie.
- ▶ Brush your teeth at the same time she does. Let her go first, but then start up yourself so she can learn by watching your example.
- ▶ Sing a special tooth-brushing song together.
- ▶ Teach her how to spit by saying "patooyey" and aiming for the sink.
- ▶ After you're done, admire your smiles.
- ▶ Consider sometimes eating foods, like broccoli, that stick in your teeth, so that your child can get a "before" and "after" viewpoint.
- ▶ Read books about tooth-brushing and teeth together.

Dentist Fears

Your child might be afraid of the dentist. Perhaps, you too, prefer not to go. There are a number of things you can do to help your child face this fear. **Setting a good example by going to the dentist calmly is the first thing you can do. If your child gets to watch you sit in the chair, then he may be calmer once it is his turn. You can also:**

- ▶ Choose a dentist carefully. You might want to find a pediatric dentist who is an expert on working with children.
- ▶ Ask if the dentist will let you sit with the child in your lap during the appointment.
- ▶ Talk to your child about her fears.
- ▶ Schedule the appointment for a time when your child will be well-rested.



Dental Health in Child Care

If your child is in child care, there are two major things you can do to ensure his dental health is being protected. First, talk to the provider to see what types of meals are served. If there are a lot of sugary sweets and not enough healthy snacks, you can ask the provider to change the menu.

In addition, if your child is going to sleep or nap at child care, you should make sure the provider is only giving them a bottle with water, and if appropriate, that the child gets to brush his or her teeth before going to bed. Make sure your toddler isn't allowed to walk around with a bottle.

Dental health is very important for grown-ups and children. Being a good example for your child will not only help him learn the right behavior . . . it will also help you keep your teeth clean and healthy!

For More Information:

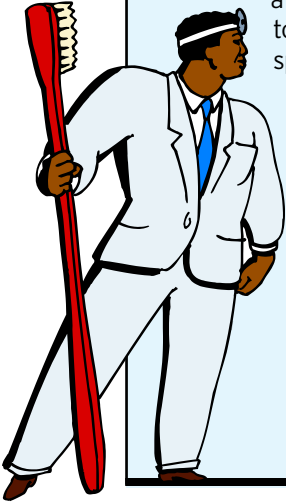
- ▶ The Child Development Institute, www.childdevelopmentinfo.com/health_safety/dental_information.shtml, has information on all aspects of parenting and is recommended by the American Psychological Association. They have a special page all about children's dental health, with topics ranging from healthy snacks to various dental problems.
- ▶ KidsHealth, www.kidshealth.org, provides doctor-approved health information about children from before birth through adolescence. Created by The Nemours Foundation's Center for Children's Health Media,



Children's Dental Health

KidsHealth provides families with accurate, up-to-date, and jargon-free health information they can use. A search for "Teeth" on KidsHealth brings up several helpful articles.

- ▶ The American Dental Association (ADA), www.ada.org, is a professional association for dentists, but its website features a lot of information for parents, including how to pick a dentist and information on proper tooth care. Every February, the ADA sponsors National Children's Dental Health Month.



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