

# How to have good Oral Health

## Before Your Child's Birth

Most people are unaware that a child's dental care actually begins before birth. Before babies are born, they have 20 primary (baby) teeth below the gums. These teeth develop during the 4th month of pregnancy. Wiping baby's gums with a clean damp cloth after feeding will remove the plaque and bacteria that can harm erupting teeth. At about 6 months of age, your baby's first teeth will begin to push through the gums. It is common for babies to cry and drool more when their teeth begin to come in.



## The First Dental Visit

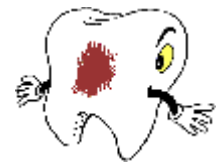
Your child should see a dentist by their first birthday. In addition to checking for decay or other problems, the dentist will teach you how to properly clean your child's teeth, identify fluoride needs, and discuss any habits that could affect the future of their teeth such as thumb sucking.



## As Your Child Grows Up

### Why are Primary Teeth (Baby Teeth) Important?

- They help a child learn to speak properly
- Healthy primary teeth help build a child's self-esteem
- These teeth make sure there is enough room for permanent teeth
- Primary teeth are important for eating and good nutrition in children



### Tooth Decay/Early Childhood Caries

Cavities are caused by bacteria that live on the sugar in your child's mouth. The bacteria cause a sticky substance called plaque to form on teeth. The plaque creates acid that eats away the hard outer coating on teeth, forming a hole (called a cavity). Early Childhood Caries (cavities) is a serious form of tooth decay. It is caused by the frequent and long exposure of an infant's teeth to liquids that contain sugar (milk, formula, fruit juice, and other sweet drinks). Bacteria that cause cavities can also be passed from parent to child by sharing eating utensils.

### How to Prevent Tooth Decay in Your Child For infants and toddlers

- Starting the first few days after birth, take a wet cloth and wipe it over your baby's gums after each feeding.
- Never give your baby a pacifier dipped in soda, or other sugary drinks.
- If you must put your baby to bed with a bottle, make sure it is only filled with water.
- Once your baby has a tooth, use a cotton swab or soft infant toothbrush to clean your baby's teeth daily to get rid of any plaque.
- Avoid sharing silverware or chewing food for your baby. Bacteria that live in your mouth can cause tooth decay in your baby's mouth.



## For school-aged children

- Until your child is 6 or 7 years old, you should help your child brush and floss their teeth.
- Begin flossing your child's teeth as soon as any two teeth touch. Your dentist can show you how to properly floss your child's teeth
- Use only a pea-sized amount of toothpaste on your child's toothbrush. Make sure they spit the toothpaste out instead of swallowing it.
- Once your child's permanent teeth come in, ask your dentist about sealants. They are protective plastic coatings that prevent food from settling in the grooves of the teeth.
- Sealants are a painless way to prevent tooth decay.
- Give your child juice only at mealtimes, and not throughout the day.
- The trick to fighting cavities is giving your child healthy meals and snacks as well as teaching them healthy habits.
- Make brushing and flossing fun for your child.

Be enthusiastic, it is contagious!



## Dental Sealants

A dental sealant is a clear material that is applied to the chewing surfaces of the back teeth where most decay occurs. The sealant acts as a barrier, protecting teeth from bacteria and acid that attack enamel. As your child's permanent teeth come in, talk to your dentist about having sealants applied to your child's teeth.

## Mother Nature Wants Children To Have Healthy Teeth

Fluoride is one of the most effective agents for preventing tooth decay. The best way your child can receive fluoride is by drinking water containing the right amount of fluoride. If your water supply is not optimally fluoridated, your dentist or pediatrician can provide your child with fluoride supplements.

## Injury

Active children require proper equipment to help prevent against accidents to the face, tongue, teeth, and lips. Your dentist will be able to provide you with information about different types of mouth guards.



## The Dentist Shouldn't Be Scary

Help your child understand that the dentist is a friendly doctor who will help them keep and take care of their teeth. Be positive and make dental appointments a pleasant experience. Children learn by example, so it is important for you to brush and floss your teeth and see the dentist on a regular basis. Good health habits are formed at an early age and it is critical that you help your child achieve a healthy smile for life!