

Ensuring Oral Health for Our Children

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National Children's Dental Health Month is celebrated in February, but we need to provide good dental care to our children all year round. Tooth decay can be very painful for children and if left untreated, can negatively impact their ability to eat, speak, play, and learn.ⁱ Below are tips for making sure your child has excellent dental health.

Even before your baby has teeth, you can take care of their dental health. Wiping gums with a soft wet cloth after feedings helps to prevent the buildup of bacteria on the gums. Once your baby's teeth start to erupt begin using a soft children's toothbrush twice a day. No toothpaste is needed at this age. By not putting your baby to bed with a bottle you establish healthy practices to prevent "baby bottle tooth decay," cavities caused when babies sleep with a bottle which allows milk to pool in their mouth.

The American Dental Association recommends that your baby's first visit to the dentist occur after the eruption of the first tooth but no later than the first birthday.ⁱⁱ At this first visit, dentists will demonstrate how to clean your baby's teeth and this will be the beginning of your baby's routine visits to the dentist.

Once your child is preschool age, teaching them how to brush and encouraging the practice at least twice daily is recommended by dental professionals. Using a pea sized amount of fluoride toothpaste is recommended because children this age have a tendency to swallow most of the toothpaste. This small amount will ensure that they are not swallowing too much which can cause permanent staining of the teeth.ⁱⁱⁱ Ensuring they eat healthy snacks and limiting sugary beverages or not serving them at all will help prevent the formation of cavities as well.





For more information on dental health, check out these resources:

The American Dental Health Association, Manage Your Oral Health,
<http://www.ada.org/364.aspx>

Your Child's Growing Smile,
http://www.ada.org/sections/scienceAndResearch/pdfs/forthedentalpatient_dec2011.pdf

The Division of Oral Health, The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,
<http://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/topics/child.htm>

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ⁱ *Children's Oral Health*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website,
<http://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/topics/child.htm>, January 28, 2012.

ⁱⁱ Your Child's Growing Smile, The American Dental Association website,
http://www.ada.org/sections/scienceAndResearch/pdfs/forthedentalpatient_dec2011.pdf, January 28, 2012.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Dental Hygiene: How to Care for your Child's Teeth*, FamilyDoctor.org,
<http://familydoctor.org/familydoctor/en/kids/eating-nutrition/teeth-teething/dental-hygiene-how-to-care-for-your-childs-teeth.printerview.all.html>, January 28, 2012.