



Caring for Baby's First Teeth

Set-up a lifetime of good oral hygiene

It's easy to underestimate the importance of taking care of your baby's teeth. After all, they're not permanent, right? But doing the minimum, or nothing, until "real" adult teeth develop is part of the reason that 42% of 2 to 11 year-olds in the U.S. have tooth decay.¹ The good news? It's preventable!

Healthy baby teeth, healthier adult teeth

Your child's baby teeth are important for several reasons, so make sure you take care of those first teeth at an early age.

- Baby teeth hold space for the adult teeth that will follow. A decaying or missing tooth provides inadequate space, which can only be enlarged to the proper size with orthodontic treatment.
- Infected baby teeth can lead to stained, pitted or weaker adult teeth.
- Baby teeth play a critical role in speech development. They are also essential for proper chewing, which promotes healthy nutrition.

Oral care by the numbers

When it comes to dental care, everyone should see a dentist twice a year—and babies are no different than adults. The American Academy of Pediatric Dentists (AAPD) offers the following timeline for a child's first two years.²

Birth to 6 months

- Use a soft cloth or gauze to clean baby's gums starting the first few days after birth.
- Ask your child's pediatrician about the need for fluoride supplements.
- Learn the benefits of regulating bottle-feeding and breastfeeding habits.

6 months to 1 year

- The first tooth usually appears during this timeframe, so it's a good time to schedule an exam with a pediatric dentist.
- Brush after each feeding and before bed with small, soft toothbrush.
- Minimize the potential for dental injuries as your child begins to walk.

1 year to 2 years

- Schedule exams and cleanings every six months, or as recommended by your child's pediatric dentist.
- When your child has mastered rinsing his or her own mouth, and most baby teeth have come in, ask your child's dentist about the best time to begin using toothpaste.

Round out good oral health

We know you want to provide the best oral health for your child(ren). Dentists have a wealth of information, so be sure to ask questions and voice any concerns.

- **Fluoride** makes tooth enamel more resistant to decay. Many communities add fluoride to the water supply. If yours doesn't, or your child only consumes bottled water, the dentist may recommend a fluoride supplement.

- **Baby bottle tooth decay** happens if a baby naps or goes to bed with a bottle filled with milk, juice or other sugary drink. When the sugars in these drinks coat teeth for a prolonged period of time, the enamel can break down, leading to decay. The solution? Only fill bottles with water whenever your baby is sleeping.
- **Teething** is a normal part of childhood and most parents don't escape without some anxiety. The simple pressure from mom or dad's finger often does the trick to ease pain, as do frozen washcloths.

Good infant oral health can save you money

Research shows that kids who have their first dental visit before age one have 40 percent lower dental costs by age five than kids who don't.³ But, it's not only about saving money. Kids with healthy teeth have higher self-esteem and do better in school.⁴ So make caring for those baby teeth a priority—everyone will benefit from it!

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Oral health and children. Accessed February 21, 2014 at: www.cdc.gov/OralHealth/children_adults/child.htm.

² American Association of Pediatric Dentistry. Guideline on periodicity of examination, preventive dental services, anticipatory guidance/counseling, and oral treatment for infants, children, and adolescents, Clinical Guidelines, V 35, NO 6, 13 / 14. Accessed February 21, 2014 at: http://www.mychildrensteeth.org/media/Policies_Guidelines/G_Periodicity.pdf.

³ American Association of Pediatric Dentistry. Get it done in Year One. Accessed February 21, 2014 at: <http://www.aapd.org/assets/2/7/GetItDoneInYearOne.pdf>.

⁴ World Health Organization. Health-promoting schools: an opportunity for oral health promotion. Accessed February 21, 2014 at: <http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/83/9/kwan0905abstract/en/>.