



Children's Oral Health

Building Healthy Smiles That Last a Lifetime

Why Children's Oral Health Matters

Good oral health begins early in life. Healthy primary (baby) teeth are essential for eating, speaking, smiling, and guiding permanent teeth into their proper positions. Establishing healthy habits during childhood can reduce the risk of tooth decay and help children maintain good oral health throughout their lives.

Tooth decay is one of the most common chronic diseases in children, but it is largely preventable through good daily oral hygiene, a healthy diet, fluoride exposure, and regular dental care.

Why Baby Teeth Are Important

Although baby teeth eventually fall out, they serve many important functions.

Healthy primary teeth help children:

- Chew food properly
- Learn to speak clearly
- Maintain space for permanent teeth
- Support normal jaw development
- Build confidence through a healthy smile

Untreated decay in baby teeth can cause pain, infection, difficulty eating, and problems with the development of permanent teeth.

When Should Oral Care Begin?

Oral care starts before the first tooth appears.

Parents can gently wipe an infant's gums with a clean, soft, damp cloth after feedings.

Once the first tooth erupts:

- Begin brushing twice a day with a soft infant toothbrush.
- Use fluoride toothpaste in the recommended amount.
- Continue daily oral hygiene as additional teeth erupt.

Early habits create the foundation for lifelong oral health.

Using Fluoride Toothpaste

Fluoride helps strengthen tooth enamel and prevent cavities.

The recommended amount of fluoride toothpaste depends on a child's age:

Age	Recommended Amount
Under 3 years	A smear (rice-sized amount)
3–6 years	A pea-sized amount
Over 6 years	Pea-sized amount or as directed by a dental professional

Children should always be supervised during brushing to encourage proper technique and minimize swallowing toothpaste.

Brushing Children's Teeth

Children should brush:

- **Twice every day**
- **For at least two minutes**
- Using a soft-bristled toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste

Parents should assist with brushing until children have developed the coordination needed to clean effectively, often around **7–8 years of age**.

Flossing

Begin flossing when two teeth touch each other and a toothbrush can no longer clean between them.

Parents should help children floss until they can perform the task independently.

Healthy Eating for Strong Teeth

Diet plays a major role in preventing cavities.

Choose foods such as:

- Fresh fruits
- Vegetables
- Cheese
- Yogurt
- Nuts (when age-appropriate)
- Whole grains

Limit foods and drinks high in added sugars, including:

- Candy
- Cookies
- Sweetened cereals
- Soft drinks
- Sports drinks
- Juice consumed frequently throughout the day

Frequent snacking on sugary foods increases the amount of time teeth are exposed to acid attacks.

Drinks That Support Oral Health

Water is the best beverage for maintaining oral health.

When available, fluoridated community water helps strengthen developing teeth and reduce the risk of cavities.

Milk is also a good choice for many children because it provides calcium and other nutrients important for healthy teeth and bones.

Limit sugary beverages and avoid putting infants to bed with bottles containing milk, juice, or other sweetened drinks, as this can increase the risk of early childhood cavities.

The First Dental Visit

Children should visit a dentist:

- By their **first birthday**, or
- Within **six months after the first tooth erupts**, whichever comes first.

Early dental visits help:

- Identify potential problems early
- Provide preventive care
- Educate parents about oral hygiene
- Build positive dental experiences

Regular dental checkups should continue throughout childhood.

Dental Sealants

Dental sealants are thin protective coatings placed on the chewing surfaces of permanent back teeth.

Sealants help prevent cavities by protecting the deep grooves where food and bacteria often collect.

Many children benefit from sealants soon after their permanent molars erupt.

Preventing Dental Injuries

Children are active, and accidents can happen.

Parents can help protect their children's teeth by:

- Encouraging the use of mouthguards during contact sports
- Using properly fitted car seats and seat belts
- Childproofing the home to reduce falls
- Teaching safe play habits

Healthy Habits That Last

Parents play the most important role in helping children develop lifelong oral health habits.

Encourage children to:

- Brush twice daily
- Floss every day
- Drink water instead of sugary beverages
- Eat a balanced diet
- Visit the dentist regularly
- View oral hygiene as part of everyday health

Positive routines established early often continue into adulthood.

Key Takeaways

- ✓ Healthy baby teeth are important for eating, speaking, and proper development.
 - ✓ Begin oral care as soon as the first tooth appears.
 - ✓ Brush twice daily with fluoride toothpaste.
 - ✓ Use the correct amount of toothpaste for your child's age.
 - ✓ Limit sugary snacks and drinks.
 - ✓ Schedule the first dental visit by age one or within six months of the first tooth erupting.
 - ✓ Regular preventive care helps children maintain healthy smiles for life.
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