

DENTAL HEALTH

Dental health depends on preventive care and developing good daily hygiene habits. The following guidelines are designed to assist you and your child to establish a dental routine that helps prevent tooth decay and other dental problems.

TEETHING

All infants begin to drool and exhibit mouthing behaviors around 3-4 months of age. This is not necessarily an indication that teething has begun. For some infants, teething is a painless experience. For others, teething can be troublesome. You may notice a swelling of the surface of the gum when a tooth is about to erupt. The first tooth generally erupts at 6-8 months of age but it is not uncommon to begin teething earlier or later. If your child is irritable, one-piece teething rings or acetaminophen (Tylenol) can help soothe tender gums. Teething does not cause a fever. If your child's temperature is over 101 degrees Fahrenheit, it should not be attributed to teething.

HABITS TO AVOID

Babies who are allowed to fall asleep while drinking any fluid containing sugar (formula, milk, breast milk, juice, etc.) may develop tooth decay, which often requires extensive dental treatment. You can avoid this problem entirely by not allowing your infant to begin this bad habit. Toddlers who sip milk or juice throughout the day may also develop severe tooth decay. It is best to wean your toddler from the bottle by 12-15 months and to not allow him to walk around with a bottle or cup.

THUMBSUCKING

Sucking is a normal part of child development. Most experts agree that thumbsucking does not cause a problem if it is not continued beyond the age of 5 years. Similarly, pacifiers generally do not cause dental problems unless they are used for extended periods of time. Pacifiers should never be dipped in sugar.

FLUORIDE AND CAVITY PREVENTION

It is known that fluoride can strengthen teeth and prevent cavities. Because of this fluoride is often added to community drinking water, toothpaste and mouth rinse. It can also be taken as prescription drops or tablets to swallow, as well as applied directly to the teeth by a health professional.

In 2014, The American Dental Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics both made a new recommendation on how to provide fluoride to children. It is now recommended that starting from the eruption of the first tooth; children have their teeth brushed with fluoridated toothpaste.

HPA is now recommending the following:

- From first tooth eruption to age 3 years – twice daily brushing using a rice grain-sized amount of fluoridated toothpaste
- From age 3 to 6 years - twice daily brushing using a pea size amount of fluoridated toothpaste

Young children should not be given water to rinse after brushing because their instinct is to swallow. Spitting without rinsing will reduce the amount of fluoride swallowed and leave some fluoride in the saliva where it can help the teeth. If they swallow the toothpaste, the amount of fluoride swallowed will be no higher than the amount gotten from a prescription fluoride supplement.

The amount of fluoride in toothpaste is standardized, so any brand can be used.

Some children benefit from receiving a dietary fluoride supplement. Your child's dentist may choose to prescribe one of these supplements.

To ensure proper cleaning, continue to brush your child's teeth until the age of 4-5 years (when children are better able to brush themselves). Encourage your child to "have a turn, too."

SWEETS

Sugar of any type (including fruits and raisins) can cause tooth decay. The more frequent the exposure to sugar, the more likely decay is to occur. Thus it is best to have regularly scheduled meal/snack times and avoid "nibbling."

DENTAL CHECK-UPS

The first visit to a dentist should occur around 3 years of age. This is usually when all 20 primary teeth have erupted and your child is able to cooperate for a dental examination. If your pediatrician detects a problem sooner, an earlier referral may be given.

TRAUMA

Children who participate in sports should wear a mouth guard to protect against injury. If a tooth is knocked out, it is best to place it back in the socket immediately if possible. If this is not possible, place the tooth in milk or a Save-A-Tooth kit and see the dentist urgently. Save-A-Tooth kits can be purchased on-line at www.Save-A-Tooth.com or by calling 888-788-6684.