

Oral Hygiene For Babies And Toddlers

Training children to prioritize and practice good oral hygiene habits early can result in a healthy smile that lasts a lifetime. Even as the very first baby teeth begin to erupt through the gums around 6 to 8 months of age, the infant's state of oral health has the potential to affect their future adult smile.

Risk For Decay Starts Early

The risk for decay increases as soon as the child's first baby teeth appear. Some infants experience such severe tooth decay, that their teeth are unable to be repaired and must be extracted. This usually occurs when a baby is in the habit of being put to sleep with a bottle. Typically, the upper front teeth are most affected but decay can occur in other teeth as well.

When a baby tooth is lost prematurely due to accidents or oral decay, among other reasons, crowding and spatial problems can occur with the eventual eruption of the permanent teeth. The healthier the primary set of teeth stays, the less risk exists for the permanent teeth to "come in" incorrectly or experience decay. Consequently, prioritizing an infant's oral health from the beginning can aid in preserving a healthy smile for decades.

Tooth Decay is Preventable

Tooth decay is preventable through practicing good oral hygiene and visiting the dentist regularly and as recommended! It is recommended that parents take their child to the Pediatric Dentist within 6 months of the eruption of their first tooth and no later than their first birthday. The Pediatric Dentist will advise the parents on how to care for their baby's mouth, check for decay, and inform them of any possible problems.

Cleaning Your Infant or Toddler's Teeth

Oral hygiene practices change and increase with age so here are some tips to caring for your child's dental health from birth through toddlerhood.



Smear
Age less than 2 years



Pea-size
Age 2 to 5 years



Regular
Age more than 5 years

Birth to 6 months:

Dental hygiene begins at birth. Implementing healthy habits from the start can make all the difference in reducing and preventing tooth decay in infants and kids. Clean an infant's gums lightly after every feeding with a moistened washcloth or damp clean gauze pad. Never put a baby to sleep with a bottle, prop a bottle in a baby's mouth, or let a baby feed "at will." As dental decay is a communicable and infectious disease, try not to ever test the temperature of a bottle with your mouth. Also keep from sharing utensils or washing a pacifier or bottle nipple by putting it in your mouth. Sticking to these practices helps stop the spreading of bacterium that generate tooth decay.

6-12 months:

Usually the first tooth erupts through the gums between 6 and 8 months of age. Practicing increased healthy habits from the moment teeth begin to appear, once again, reduces and prevents the chance for tooth decay. After feeding, continue to clean the infant's gums with a wet washcloth or clean damp gauze pad. As the infant begins to eat more solid foods and is able to drink from a cup, start weaning the baby from the bottle one step at a time. Usually by 12 to 14 months, babies can drink from a cup, so it is a good idea to start slowly offering them cups of water or juice instead of a bottle at that time. At this point, do not allow the baby to walk

around carrying his/her bottle, and practice healthy habits by restricting the amount of sweet food and beverages the child consumes.

It is also important to know what the normal appearance of a child's gums and teeth look like. Regularly check for new small white or brown spots on the child's teeth, which may indicate tooth decay. If any questionable or strange looking spots of this sort appear, contact the Pediatric Dentist for an appointment immediately. Schedule the child's first dental appointment at this stage, as it is recommended for a child to be examined by a Pediatric Dentist no later than the first birthday.

12-18 months:

By one year of age, a child should undergo an oral examination by a Pediatric Dentist. At this stage, brush a child's teeth for them twice a day with plain water. Keep checking regularly for suspicious white or brown spots on the teeth, which can denote tooth decay, and make an appointment with the Pediatric Dentist immediately if any such spot are noticed. Also continue to avoid spreading decay causing germs to the child by refraining from any practices that might transmit saliva, such as drink sharing.

18 months-5 years:

At 24 months, start brushing the child's teeth twice a day with a pea-sized amount of fluoridated toothpaste. Make sure that the child does not swallow any of the toothpaste, and teach him/her to spit all of it out after brushing. Begin teaching the child how to brush his/her own teeth, but typically children need help until they possess the hand coordination to sufficiently brush their own teeth. Children should be capable of brushing without supervision around age 6 or 7. By 30 months, most of the primary (baby) teeth should be in, and by 3 years old toddlers should no longer be using their pacifiers and/or sucking their thumbs. If a child is over the age of 3 and regularly still uses a pacifier or sucks his/her thumb consult the Pediatric Dentist. At this point, the child should be visiting the Pediatric Dentist for regular checkups. Also remember to continue to check for suspicious white or brown spots on the teeth, which

may indicate tooth decay. Anytime uncharacteristic or suspicious spots appear in a child's mouth, the dentist should be contacted.