

Start early, start right

The fundamentals
of oral care for kids



Healthy teeth are key to a healthy childhood: kids need them for chewing, speaking clearly, and having a bright smile. And thanks to advances in dentistry and oral care products, today's children are more likely than ever to grow up with strong, healthy teeth. As a parent, you play an important role in your child's dental health: in fact, good oral care begins with you.



It is especially important to keep your child enthusiastic and motivated about caring for his or her teeth. So whether you're teaching your children how to brush properly or taking them to the

dentist for a checkup, remember that it's up to you to set a good example. And don't forget to praise your child afterwards for clean teeth and a healthy smile!

How will my baby's teeth develop?

Usually, your baby's front four teeth (two on the top and two on the bottom) are the first to appear, sometime between six months and one year of age. These are often accompanied by sore or tender gums that may appear red or swollen. This stage is known as teething. Ask your dentist for tips on how to relieve your baby's discomfort.



By the time your child is three years old, he or she should have a complete set of 20 primary (or baby) teeth. It is very important to take good care of these first teeth, even though they will be replaced by permanent teeth. This is because your child's baby teeth hold the spaces for the permanent teeth to come in; if a baby tooth is lost, the permanent tooth could come in crooked.



When will my child's baby teeth start to fall out?

Baby teeth will begin to be replaced by permanent teeth from around age six until age 12 or 13. By the time your child's wisdom teeth erupt at around age 16, he or she will have a complete set of 32 permanent teeth.



Because the process of replacing primary teeth with permanent teeth occurs gradually, keeping all the teeth clean may be a challenge. That's because your child will have larger permanent teeth growing in next to smaller primary teeth, and this unevenness means lots of spaces for food and *plaque* to collect.

Plaque is the colorless, sticky film of bacteria that is constantly forming on your teeth and, left to build up, is one of the main causes of tooth decay and gum disease.

How can I help keep my child's teeth cavity-free?

Of all age groups children are the most at risk for cavities. They tend to eat more frequently and have not yet become experts at brushing their teeth. So it is vital that their teeth are brushed properly with a fluoride toothpaste at least twice a day, which means brushing for them the areas they might have missed on their own. Give them healthy snacks, like bread and fruit, to help keep their teeth cavity-free.

So how important is my child's diet?

Very! Guide children away from sugary foods and drinks and reduce the number of times they have them during the day, for example, by just serving them at mealtimes. It's always a good idea to have your children brush after eating.



How should I brush my child's teeth?

You should follow the same approach that you would take when brushing your own teeth. It often helps to stand behind your child and tilt his or her head back.



1. Start by cleaning the chewing surfaces with a soft-bristled children's toothbrush, using short back-and-forth strokes.



2. For the outer tooth surfaces, place the toothbrush at a 45-degree angle toward the gumline.



3. Move the brush back and forth in short, gentle strokes.



4. To clean the inner front tooth surfaces, hold the brush vertically and use gentle up-and-down strokes with the tip of the brush.

5. Make sure the gumline and back teeth are cleaned thoroughly.

Replace your child's toothbrush when it begins to show wear, or every three months, whichever comes first.

By age three or four, your child should be able to brush his or her own teeth—with your help, of course. To make it easier, start your child off with a simple brushing technique, for example, a small, circular brushing motion.

When should children start brushing on their own?

While it varies from child to child, generally children under age eight will need help brushing their teeth. And whether you are still brushing your child's teeth or just supervising, you should follow these simple guidelines:



Brush at least twice a day—in the morning and just before bed.



Spend two minutes brushing—concentrating on the chewing surfaces and back teeth, where cavities often first develop.



Use a pea-sized amount of children's fluoride toothpaste. Teach your child to rinse and spit out any toothpaste left after brushing.



Look for a brush that is suitable for your child's age and dexterity.



Don't share brushes between children.



Brushing your teeth together sets a good example and helps your child to learn by watching and imitating you!

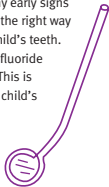
Should I be flossing my child's teeth?

Yes. Check with your dentist when you should start, but a good rule of thumb is when two teeth touch. This normally happens first with the back teeth. To begin with, you will have to floss their teeth for them, but eventually they will be able to do it on their own.

Using a *dental flossette* may help you and your child get used to flossing. You should continue to supervise flossing until your child is able to do a thorough job alone. Remember, the earlier you start flossing, the more likely it will become part of the daily routine. So start them off early. And one final tip: don't forget to praise your child for a job well done!

What should I expect from my child's dental visits?

The dentist will examine your child's teeth, gums, and jaw; check for any early signs of problems; and show you the right way to clean and care for your child's teeth. He or she may also discuss fluoride supplements, if necessary. This is also a time to ask how your child's teeth are developing.



How does fluoride benefit my child's teeth?

Fluoride is a natural mineral that strengthens tooth enamel and helps prevent cavities from forming. Both adults and children benefit from fluoride. Brushing with a children's fluoride toothpaste can help ensure that your child's teeth receive the benefits of fluoride in strengthening enamel and preventing cavities on a daily basis. In-office fluoride treatments may also be advised.



How can sealants help?

Your dentist or hygienist can further help prevent childhood tooth decay by applying a *sealant*: a plastic material that fills in the grooves on the chewing surfaces of the teeth, where cavities often first develop.

What should I do if my child's permanent teeth do not come in straight?

Teeth that do not come in straight often make cleaning more difficult. Your dentist or hygienist can offer advice on how to keep



these areas clean. You may also want to discuss a specific treatment plan to straighten teeth before all permanent teeth have erupted. Your dentist may refer you to an *orthodontist*, a dentist who specializes in correcting jaw and teeth irregularities.

What can I do to protect my child's teeth while playing sports?

After tooth decay and gum disease, accidental injury to teeth is the most common dental problem of children and teenagers. Mouth-guards should be worn during all highly active or contact sports. Ready-made mouthguards are available at sporting goods stores, but the most effective mouthguards are custom-made by your dentist.



What should I do if one of my child's teeth is accidentally knocked out?

Place the tooth in cool milk or salt water—don't wash it off or clean it—call or get to the dentist right away.

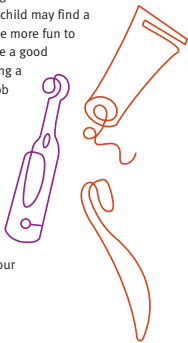
How do I choose the right toothbrush and toothpaste for my child?

Children's teeth should be brushed with an *extra-soft toothbrush* that has been specifically designed for children. Today, many toothbrushes come with colorful, fun designs that can motivate a child to brush. Be sure to choose the design your child prefers, as well as the right size for their age and dexterity, to encourage brushing.

An option to consider is a child's power toothbrush, which provides effective and safe brushing.

In addition, your child may find a power brush to be more fun to use, which can be a good motivator for doing a more thorough job of brushing.

Many children's toothpastes are flavored with child-pleasing tastes to further encourage brushing. Again, be sure to pick your child's favorite.



Remember, good oral care begins with you!

A lifetime of good oral health can be a reality for your child if you get him or her off on the right track early. Keep them motivated by setting a good example yourself and create a consistent and fun environment for toothbrushing. Soon, they'll learn to recognize it as part of their daily routine, just like eating breakfast or reading a bedtime story.

So, remember, *starting early and starting right* will ensure that your child's smile stays healthy and bright!



Start early, start right— a quick guide:



Your child's first dental visit should be between the eruption of the first tooth and his or her first birthday.



Brush your children's teeth until they are around three years old, then start encouraging them to join in. Supervise their brushing until age eight.



Children under age four should use a simple brushing technique—such as a small, circular brushing motion.



Choose a children's toothbrush with a small brushhead and soft bristles.



Use only a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste. Teach your child to rinse and spit out any toothpaste left after brushing.



Flossing should start when two teeth touch and supervision is needed until at least the age of 10.

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