

Protecting Your Child's Teeth

The Growing Years

Parents need to supervise tooth brushing to make sure children over age two use only a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste and avoid swallowing the toothpaste.

- Parents should be using floss on their children's teeth as soon as any two teeth touch.
- Cleaning between the teeth removes plaque where a toothbrush can't reach.
- Brush your child's teeth twice a day unless your dentist recommends otherwise.

Early Childhood Tooth Decay

The baby teeth are very important for chewing, speaking and appearance. They also help hold space in the jaws for the permanent teeth. Baby bottle tooth decay is caused by frequent and long exposures of a baby's teeth to liquids that contain sugar, such as milk, formula, or juice.

Tips on Avoiding Early Childhood Tooth Decay

1. Never allow your child to fall asleep with a bottle containing a sweetened liquid.
2. After each feeding, wipe the child's gums with a clean cloth.
3. Never give your child a pacifier dipped in any sweetened liquid.
4. Take your child for a first dental visit within six months of the first baby tooth and by no later than the first birthday.

Sealing Out Decay

Thorough brushing and flossing help remove food particles and plaque from smooth surfaces of teeth, but toothbrush bristles cannot reach all the way into the depressions and grooves to extract food and plaque.

- Dental sealants act as a barrier, protecting the teeth against decay-causing bacteria.
- A sealant is a plastic material that is applied to the chewing surfaces of the back teeth (premolars and molars) where decay occurs most often.

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Establish Healthy Habits

Practicing healthy eating and drinking habits regularly is essential to keeping your child's teeth strong. By establishing positive health behaviors in the home, you can help prevent oral health problems in the future.

- Allow a balanced diet and good nutrition to maintain healthy teeth and gums.
- Avoid foods with high amounts of added sugars to decrease the amount of tooth decay.
- Maintain daily calcium and vitamin D intake to help with tooth structure and growth.
- Reduce the amount of soft drinks and sugary juices.

Commonly Asked Dental Health Questions

What Causes Bad Breath?

If you don't brush and floss daily, particles of food remain in the mouth, collecting bacteria, which can cause bad breath.

- Food that collects between the teeth, on the tongue and around the gums can rot, leaving an unpleasant odor.
- Dentures that are not cleaned properly can harbor odor-causing bacteria and food particles.
- Tobacco products cause bad breath, stain teeth, reduce one's ability to taste foods and irritate gum tissue.
- Tobacco users are more likely to suffer from periodontal disease and are at greater risk for developing oral cancer.

What is Gum Disease?

Also known as periodontal disease, gum disease is an infection of the tissues surrounding and supporting the teeth. It is a major cause of tooth loss in adults. Because gum disease is usually painless, you may not know you have it.

- Gum disease is caused by plaque, a sticky film of bacteria, that constantly forms on the teeth and creates toxins that can damage the gums.
- In the early stage of gum disease, called gingivitis, the gums can become red, swollen and bleed easily. At this stage, the disease is still reversible and can usually be eliminated by daily brushing and flossing.
- In the more advanced stages of gum disease, called periodontitis, the gums and bone that support the teeth can become seriously damaged. The teeth can become loose, fall out or have to be removed by a dentist.

Why Visit a Dentist?

Some people think a dental check-up is time consuming and difficult to fit in their daily schedule. But others realize that even when their teeth aren't bothering them, a visit to the dentist is important.

- During the exam, the dentist checks for signs of tooth decay and oral cancer, examining your tongue, glands and the inside of your mouth.
- The dentist also checks your bite and looks for problems such as teeth grinding and disorders of the jaw joint.
- Your dental hygienist will clean your teeth to remove the plaque left after you brush and floss.



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