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Caring for your children's teeth

Birth to 12 months

- **Good dental habits should begin before the first tooth appears.** After feedings, gently brush your baby's gums using water on a baby toothbrush that has soft bristles, or wipe them with a clean washcloth.
- **Ask about fluoride.** After the first tooth appears, ask your child's doctor if your baby is getting enough fluoride. Many experts recommend using a fluoride-free toothpaste before the age of 2.
- **Schedule your baby's well-child visits.** During these visits your child's doctor will check your baby's mouth.

12 to 24 months

- **Brush!** Brush your child's teeth 2 times a day using water on a baby toothbrush that has soft bristles. The best times to brush are after breakfast and before bed.
- **Limit juice.** Make sure your child doesn't drink more than 4 ounces of juice each day and only at mealtimes. Allowing your child to drink from a sippy cup of juice (even diluted juice) throughout the day promotes dental carries.
- **Consult with your child's dentist or doctor about sucking habits.** Sucking too strongly on a pacifier, a thumb, or fingers can affect the shape of the mouth and how the top and bottom teeth line up. This is called your child's "bite." Ask your child's dentist or doctor to help you look for changes in your child's bite and how to help your child ease out of his sucking habit.
- **Schedule a dental checkup.** Take your child for a dental checkup if he has not had one.

24 months

- **Brush!** Help your child brush her teeth 2 times a day with a child-sized toothbrush that has soft bristles. There are brushes designed to address the different needs of children at all ages, ensuring that you can select a toothbrush that is appropriate for your child. Encourage her to brush her teeth on her own. However, to make sure your child's teeth are clean, you should brush them again. If your child doesn't want her teeth brushed, it may help to turn it into a game.
- **Use fluoride toothpaste.** You can start using fluoride toothpaste, which helps prevent cavities. Teach your child not to swallow it. Use a pea-sized amount or less and smear the paste into the bristles. Swallowing too much fluoride toothpaste can make white or brown spots on your child's adult teeth. If your child doesn't like the taste of the toothpaste, try another flavor or use plain water.
- **Floss.** You can begin flossing your child's teeth as soon as 2 teeth touch each other. Not all children need their teeth flossed at this age. Check with your dentist first.
- **Schedule a dental checkup.** Take your child for a dental checkup at least once a year.



How can I help my child prevent tooth decay?

Tooth decay develops when a child's teeth and gums are exposed to any liquid or food other than water for long periods. The most common way this happens is when parents put their children to bed with a bottle of formula, milk, juice, soft drinks, sugar water, or sugared drinks. It can also occur when children are allowed to drink from a sippy cup, suck on a bottle, or breastfeed for long periods of time during the day or night.

- **Never put your child to bed with a bottle or food.** This exposes your child's teeth to sugars and , it puts your child at risk for ear infections and choking.
- **Teach your child to drink from a cup** as soon as possible. Drinking from a cup is less likely to cause the liquid to collect around the teeth. Additionally, a cup cannot be taken to bed.
- **If your child must have a bottle or sippy cup** for long periods, fill it with water only.

Brushing and flossing

Your child may need some help brushing until he is between ages 7 and 10. Even if his intentions are good, he may not have the dexterity to clean his teeth well. Ideally, the teeth should be brushed within five to 10 minutes after eating. Your child also needs to care for his gums as well and should be taught to floss regularly, preferably once a day.

A tartar-control toothpaste can help keep plaque from adhering to your child's teeth. Fluoride in the toothpaste can strengthen the exposed outer enamel of the youngster's teeth and help prevent cavities. Fluoride has been added to the water supply in many cities. If your own tap water has less than the recommended levels of this nutrient, your pediatrician may suggest that you add fluoride to your child's diet beginning at age 6 months, often as part of a vitamin supplement. Fluoride treatment should continue until age 16. Ask your doctor or dentist for guidance.

Dental checkups

Make sure your youngster has dental checkups twice a year for cleaning and for X-rays as recommended by your dentist. Regular preventive appointments will significantly decrease your child's chances of ever having to undergo major dental treatment.



Poison-Proofing Your Home

Most poisonings take place when parents or caregivers are home but not paying attention. The most dangerous potential poisons are medicines, cleaning products, antifreeze, windshield wiper fluid, pesticides, furniture polish, gasoline, kerosene and lamp oil. Be especially vigilant when there is a change in routine. Holidays, visits to and from grandparents' homes, and other special events may bring greater risk of poisoning if the usual safeguards are not in place.

- Store medicine, cleaners, paints/varnishes, and pesticides in their original packaging in locked cabinets or containers out of sight and reach of children.
- On child-accessible cabinets containing harmful products, install a safety latch that locks when you close the door.
- Purchase and keep all medicines in containers with safety caps. Discard unused medication.
- Never refer to medicine as "candy" or another appealing name.
- Check the label each time you give a child medicine to ensure proper dosage.
- Never place poisonous products in food or drink containers.
- Maintain working smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors.

Treatment

If your child is unconscious, not breathing, or having convulsions or seizures due to poison contact or ingestion call 911 or your local emergency number immediately. If your child has come into contact with poison and has mild or no symptoms call your poison control center at 1-800-222-1222.

Different types and methods of poisoning require different, immediate treatment:

- Swallowed poison – Remove the item from the child, and have the child spit out any remaining substance. ***Do not make your child vomit. Do not use syrup of ipecac.***
- Skin poison -- Remove the child's clothes and rinse the skin with lukewarm water for at least 15 minutes.
- Eye poison -- Flush the child's eye by holding the eyelid open and pouring a steady stream of room temperature water into the inner corner.
- Poisonous fumes – Take the child outside or into fresh air immediately. If the child has stopped breathing, start cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and do not stop until the child breathes on his own, or until someone else can take over.