

How to Keep Children *SMILING*



IT'S EASY TO KEEP BABY'S TEETH HEALTHY FROM THE START. Parents/caregivers should begin a routine of daily oral hygiene care for children at an early age. Fermentable carbohydrates (mainly sugars and starches) and plaque (an invisible, sticky layer of harmful bacteria) constantly form on the teeth and are broken down by bacteria to produce acid and new plaque. Poor oral hygiene care also makes infants and toddlers susceptible to early childhood caries. Early childhood caries can start very soon after teeth erupt and progress quickly. In order to intercept any potential problems, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends a child's first visit to the dentist be no later than 12 months of age or 6 months after the first tooth erupts.

HOW TO CHECK BABY TEETH. Ask your dentist or hygienist to show you how to "lift the lip" of a child and look inside. Once a month, look for "white spots" on a child's teeth—it takes less than one minute to do! Doing this on a regular basis allows the child to become accustomed to your hands and instruments and will make it easier for you to clean their teeth.



TAKING CARE OF CHILDREN'S TEETH. Cleaning a child's teeth and gums after eating reduces the number of harmful bacteria in the mouth and also offers you an opportunity to become familiar with the normal appearance of their teeth and gums so that you can identify problems, should they occur. Parents/caregivers should clean children's teeth daily with a small toothbrush and a pea-sized amount of fluoridated toothpaste. Children probably will not be able to brush their own teeth thoroughly until they are about seven or eight years old. Developing a regular time for tooth cleaning is a good habit to form. Children learn by example. Set a good example by letting them watch you brush and floss your teeth.

BABY TEETH ARE IMPORTANT. Parents of newborns may not realize that as soon as a baby's teeth erupt, they are susceptible to decay. Early treatment – beginning at age 2 or younger – can save most children from the physical and psychological consequences of dental neglect. Baby teeth play a significant role in a child's overall health. Without the front baby teeth, it's hard to bite into

foods like carrots and apples. Teeth help a child to chew and strengthen facial and jaw muscles. Baby teeth hold the place for permanent teeth that are still forming in the gums so it is important not to lose baby teeth prematurely. Self esteem and comfort of the child is also an important consideration.

AVOID HABITS HARMFUL TO BABY TEETH. Avoid developing a habit that will harm a baby's teeth such as putting the baby to bed with a bottle, propping it in the baby's mouth, or allowing the baby to feed "at will". If you are having trouble weaning the child from the bottle, here are some things you can do: offer a security blanket or teddy bear, use music to soothe the child, hold or rock the child before laying them down, rub the child's head and back, use an infant swing or musical mobile or read or tell a story to the child. If you must put the child to bed with a bottle, fill it only with water.



Decay is not caused by the amount of sugar consumed but the frequency with which the child eats it. Therefore, try to limit sugary snacks to mealtimes and brush the child's teeth soon after they consume them. Children need to be trained to make good decisions about food. It is important to offer them lots of healthy food choices.

Food should not be offered as a reward for good behavior.

WHAT ABOUT FLUORIDE? Fluoride is very important. It helps re-mineralize the hard, white enamel on teeth. It can also slow or stop the harmful effects of the acid produced by bacteria in the mouth. Parents/caregivers should inquire about possible fluoride supplementation for the child.

KEEP SMILING! Childhood is a unique and lively stage of development. The best or worst impressions and habits can be formed during this time. It is challenging for parents/caregivers to teach children about many different aspects of a healthy and well-balanced life. Proper oral hygiene and habits are learned through repetition and reinforcement. Children live a large part of their world through their mouth...chewing, tasting, talking, sucking and smiling. Taking care of their mouths is your responsibility and will help keep children *SMILING*.

