

A Guide to Your Child's Dental Health from Birth through Adolescence

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INFANTS (0-36M)

Milestones:

- The first teeth (lower central incisors) usually erupt around the age of 6 months.
- More teeth will continue to erupt every 1-3 months until the age of 2 1/2 - 3yrs. (See the attached Tooth Eruption Guide)

Care/Cleaning:

- Gently wipe the erupting teeth at least once a day with a soft washcloth, finger toothbrush, or soft-bristled children's tooth brush.
- Use either tap water or a baby tooth cleaner (non-fluoridated cleaner)
- As your baby gets older, cleaning will become more difficult. Try to make it fun and part of a normal routine.
- Never put your child to bed with a bottle. Long exposure to milk or juice can greatly increase the risk of tooth decay.

Fluoride:

- Do not supplement unless directed by your dentist. The fluoride provided from tap water is usually sufficient.
- If you use exclusively bottled water, there are brands which have fluoride.

Pacifiers and Thumb/Finger Sucking:

- Up until 24 months, pacifiers and thumb/finger sucking will not hurt the developing teeth.
- By age 3, pacifier and thumb/finger sucking should have ceased, or should be discouraged. It gets harder to stop as the child becomes older.

- By age 4, continued pacifier and thumb/finger sucking can cause problems with the developing teeth and jaws. (Cross Bites and Open Bites) Both conditions mean that your child is not biting/chewing properly and this may affect the development of their permanent teeth and jaws.

Dental Checkups:

- The first checkup should be with a pediatric dentist after the first tooth erupts between age 6-12 months and no later than 18 months.
- Early visits are important to help prevent any developing problems (like cavities).
- A pediatric dentist has two to three years of specialty training following dental school and limits his/her practice to treating children only.
- Early visits help your child get used to going to the dentist so that later visits are easy.
- Prevention is the best way to treat dental and orthodontic problems.
- Your pediatric dentist may recommend sealants on the back baby teeth. Sealants work by filling in the crevasses on the chewing surfaces of the teeth. This shuts out food particles that could get caught in the teeth, causing cavities. The application is fast and comfortable (no shots required) and can effectively protect teeth for many years.

CHILDREN: (3-10 YEARS)

Milestones:

- The first permanent teeth begin to erupt around age 6. (See the attached Tooth Eruption Guide)

Care/Cleaning:

- At age 3, you can begin cleaning your child's teeth twice a day with a pea-sized ball of toothpaste. Your toothpaste

should have the ADA seal of approval (which confirms it is safe and effective) and will contain fluoride.

- Have your child spit out as much as possible after brushing. Do not be concerned if they swallow some of the toothpaste.
- Do not use supplements unless your pediatric dentist prescribes them.
- As your child gets older (age 4-5), they can start brushing their own teeth while supervised. You should always brush their teeth afterwards yourself until at least age 6.
- By age 6, a child has enough coordination to brush their own teeth properly. Be sure to get them settled in a twice-a-day routine and to check to make sure that they are doing a good job.
- In particular, pay attention to the backs of the teeth, next to the gums, and the molars. Children will often brush their front teeth and miss other areas.
- Over the counter Disclosing Tablets and Disclosing Mouth Wash can be a good way to teach your child how to brush properly. When used before or after brushing, any plaque on your child's teeth will temporarily change color.

Dental Checkups:

- Continue regular visits to your pediatric dentist.
- As the permanent first molars erupt, your dentist will probably recommend sealants to reduce the risk of tooth decay. Many children who have sealants done and learn proper brushing habits never get any cavities, even as teenagers and adults.

Orthodontic Checkups:

- In particular, you should see an orthodontist if you notice an underbite, crossbite, or if it looks like the permanent teeth do not have enough space to erupt properly. (See the attached Seven Warning Signs in 7-year Olds Guide)
- If necessary, your orthodontist may recommend early

treatment (Phase I) to correct crowding, to help the permanent teeth erupt, and to help the jaws develop properly.

- Be sure that your orthodontist is experienced in treating children. Some orthodontists prefer to wait until all the permanent teeth have erupted.

PRE-TEEN/EARLY TEEN (11-14 YEARS)

Milestones:

- Your child's last baby teeth will fall out as the permanent bicuspids and 2nd molars erupt.

Care/Cleaning:

- Continue to encourage your child to maintain good brushing/flossing habits.
- Teens are more susceptible to gum disease and cavities because growth hormones stimulate oral bacteria.
- Encourage a healthy diet. Minimize sodas and sugary snacks if possible.

Dental Checkups:

- Continue to see your pediatric dentist for regular checkups.
- Your dentist will probably recommend sealants on the 2nd molars and may recommend sealants on your permanent bicuspids.

Orthodontic Checkups:

- When your 2nd molars have erupted, your orthodontist may recommend full treatment with braces. (Phase II if you had early treatment)
- Because it typically takes two years to complete full treatment, most orthodontists recommend an evaluation by age 14 so that your child will be done before they graduate from high school.

LATE TEENS (15-18 YEARS)

Milestones:

- Your pediatric dentist may refer your child to an adult dentist for their future care.
- Wisdom teeth are typically evaluated between ages 15-17 years.
- Your orthodontist or your dentist can advise you as to when to have your wisdom teeth checked. They may refer you to an oral surgeon for an evaluation.

Sports Safety

- All children and teens should wear mouthguards when playing contact sports.
- For best results, a child should practice wearing the mouthguard at home and during light exercise before using it during competition.
- Children with braces should absolutely wear mouthguards while playing sports.
- Over-the-counter mouthguards will still work – but you need to place wax over the braces before fitting the mouthguard. (Ask an orthodontist for wax and help as needed)
- Some orthodontists offer custom-fit mouthguards which are less bulky, more comfortable, and provide superior protection.