



Dental

Dental tips

How to keep your child's teeth healthy

Good habits for a lifetime of oral health.

In the United States, tooth decay affects more children than any other chronic infectious disease.¹ Untreated, decay can lead to painful infections that can cause problems with eating, speaking and learning.

The good news is that tooth decay in children is very preventable. By teaching good dental hygiene, encouraging good nutrition and scheduling regular dental visits, you can give your child the gift of healthy teeth and gums.

Brush and floss the germs away.

When your child's teeth first appear, brush them with a soft toothbrush twice daily. When your child is preschool age, add a pea-sized dab of fluoride toothpaste. Don't use more because young children tend to swallow toothpaste and ingesting too much fluoride can cause tooth stains.² As they get older, children can brush their own teeth, but young children are not able to get their teeth really clean. For that reason, parents should do the final brushing until children are seven or eight.

When a child's back teeth start to touch each other, it's time to start flossing. That's because toothbrush bristles can't reach between back teeth, leaving those areas vulnerable to bacteria.

Serve healthy meals and limit sugary snacks.

Provide well-balanced meals made up of nutritious choices from the five basic food groups: fruits, vegetables, meats and proteins, dairy products and grains. After meals, children should brush their teeth or rinse with water. To avoid



In brief:

- Help your child brush twice a day with a dab of fluoride toothpaste
- Give your child regular nutritious meals and limit between-meal snacks
- Take your child to the dentist regularly, and talk to your dentist about fluoride supplements
- When your child's first molars come in, talk to your dentist about dental sealants

tooth decay, limit sugary snacks and drinks between meals. Whenever sugar comes in contact with your child's teeth, they are attacked by decay-causing acids for 20 minutes or more.

Visit the dentist early.

Take your child for a first dentist visit when teeth begin to appear, or around their first birthday. This gives the dentist a chance to look for early problems and advise you about diet, bottles, daily oral care and any other dental requirements.

One issue to discuss with your dentist is fluoride. Fluoride strengthens teeth by hardening the tooth enamel. If you have fluoridated tap water at home, your child already receives supplemental fluoride. If you don't, talk to your dentist about providing extra fluoride treatments.

Another tool for preventing decay is sealants. Dental sealants are thin plastic coatings the dentist paints onto the chewing surfaces of your child's back teeth, where most decay begins. Getting sealants is fast, easy and painless for your child. Depending on your benefit program, sealants are usually covered as a preventive service, requiring little or no out-of-pocket payment.

By taking these simple steps when your children are young, you can help them establish good oral hygiene habits that will keep their teeth and gums strong and healthy.

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The information provided is for educational purposes only. If you have a UnitedHealthcare Dental plan, please refer to your certificate of coverage for a full description of benefits.

¹"Children's Oral Health," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <http://www.cdc.gov/OralHealth/topics/child.htm>, page last modified: January 7, 2011

²"Dental Fluorosis," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Department of Oral Health, http://www.cdc.gov/fluoridation/safety/dental_fluorosis.htm, page last modified: January 6, 2011

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