

Prevention of Dental Disease in Infants and Children

There are a number of positive steps that you can take to ensure that your child has few, if any, cavities and dental-related problems. A daily routine of proper and effective oral self-care (toothbrushing and dental flossing) is the most important part of prevention. Scheduled visits with the dentist and dental hygienist for examinations and prophylaxis (cleaning) procedures are also very important for your child's dental well-being. These suggestions will help keep your child's teeth and gums disease-free.

1. Clean your infant's teeth daily with a wet washcloth or a wet two-inch-square gauze pad.
2. Floss your child's teeth daily until the child can develop the ability to do it alone. This may not be an easy transition, but it is well worth the effort.
3. Once the teeth can be seen breaking through the gum tissue, night bottles should contain only water. Fluids from night bottles pool behind the teeth while the infant sleeps. Night bottles containing milk, juice, punch, soda, etc. can cause **extensive** decay.
4. If you do not live in an area with fluoridated water, the infant should be given a fluoride vitamin supplement. Dosage will depend on the age and weight of the infant. This should continue until the child develops wisdom teeth—well into the teen years. Your pediatrician or your dentist can write a prescription for these very important systemic fluoride vitamins.
5. Children do not develop the dexterity to properly brush and floss their own teeth until about age 6 or 7. You must make sure that the job is done well, even if it means doing this oral self-care for them. Your own good example of brushing and flossing your teeth daily will greatly enhance your child's willingness and abilities in this area.
6. Your child's first visit to the dentist should be as an infant, as teeth are just beginning to erupt. During this visit we will give you guidelines as to what you can expect in terms of oral development and what type of nutrition and oral self-care tips are appropriate for your child.
7. Your child's first treatment visit to the dentist should take place at 2 ½ years of age. An examination, cleaning, and fluoride treatment will be completed at this time.
8. The topical fluoride treatment given at the time of the child's regular cleaning appointment is important. It helps make the teeth that are already in the mouth stronger and more resistant to decay and plaque accumulation. Systemic fluoride vitamins strengthen the enamel of unerupted teeth. Topical fluoride takes over after that.
9. A plastic coating known as a *sealant* can be placed on the chewing surfaces of the back teeth. This sealant can reduce the incidence of decay on the treated surfaces by 90%. It should be placed on most back teeth, both premolars and molars, as soon as it is possible to keep these teeth dry enough for bonding the sealant in place. It is sometimes placed on baby teeth in special situations. A separate handout is available that will cover this topic in more detail. Sealants are usually applied when children are about 6 years old. The dentist or hygienist will advise you as to when he or she believes the sealant can be successfully placed.
10. When your child can understand and perform the rinse and spit routine, it is time to begin using a fluoridated mouthrinse. This is not a mouthwash used to cover bad breath. It is actually a nightly supplement to the topical fluoride treatments your child receives at the dentist's office. However, it is not nearly as strong as the office version. This is not a prescription medication.

By faithfully following these suggestions, your child may never develop any decay. If decay should begin, it will be small and easy to treat. Nothing replaces thorough daily brushing and flossing or good eating habits. Routine dental examination and cleaning appointments are vital. You will find that following these instructions will prove to be very effective in helping your child to maintain optimal dental health.

If you have any questions about dental disease prevention, please feel free to ask us