

Begin Caring for Teeth Early in Life

Infants

Birth – 1 year

For your baby:

- Gently wipe their gums twice a day with a soft, clean cloth.
- Talk to your doctor about a first dental visit once your child has a tooth.

Toddlers

1 year old

When your child's teeth come in:

- Brush twice a day with a soft, small toothbrush and plain water.
- Talk to your dentist or doctor about fluoride varnish!

2-3 years old

For your child:

- Gently brush teeth daily with a soft toothbrush.
- Use a smear of toothpaste with fluoride.
- Teach how to brush as they grow. Schedule regular dental visits.

Preschoolers

3-5 years old

Teach your child to:

- Brush and floss all their teeth (front, top and back).
- Brush twice a day using a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste.
- Spit the toothpaste without rinsing.

School-Aged

Over 6 years old

Helping your child's teeth stay healthy:

- Supervise brushing and flossing until your child knows how long to brush.
- Continue regular dental visits.

Follow the dentist's recommendations to brush teeth correctly:

- ▶ Place the toothbrush at a 45-degree angle against the gums.
- ▶ Brush back and forth gently in tooth-wide strokes. Brush the outer, inner, and top surfaces of the teeth.
- ▶ Brush the tongue to remove bacteria and freshen breath.

Healthy baby teeth are important for a lifetime of good dental health. Teeth are important to help us speak clearly, smile confidently, and chew our food thoroughly to provide nutrients for overall good health.

Give your child a healthy smile

Encourage good oral health habits to prevent tooth decay





What is Early Childhood Tooth Decay?

Cavities can form when the shiny surface of the teeth, the enamel, is harmed by common bacteria living in our mouths. The bacteria feed on sugary substances left behind from what we eat and drink. In the process, they create acids that damage tooth enamel, starting tooth decay.

Eating a healthy diet and good dental hygiene habits during infancy and toddler years reduces the risk of tooth decay and associated health issues as your child becomes older.

How can I keep my child's teeth healthy?

- **No bottles in bed.** The sugars in formula or breast milk stay on their teeth if sleeping with a bottle, setting the stage for tooth decay.
- **Keep pacifiers and feeding utensils only for your child's use.** Avoid sharing spoons, cups, and straws to prevent bacteria from moving from your mouth to your baby's mouth.
- **Create a clean teeth routine from birth.**
 - **From birth:** Wipe your baby's gums with a clean, damp washcloth after each feeding.
 - **When teeth appear:** Start using a soft-bristle toothbrush with a smear of fluoride toothpaste.
 - **Around your child's first birthday:** Brush twice daily for 2 minutes each time.
- **Introduce a cup around 6 months of age.** Offering a cup early helps your baby learn how to use it and prepares them to wean off the bottle by 12 months.
- **Offer milk, breast milk, or formula in a cup at mealtimes,** and water in between. Bottles are not recommended after your child's first birthday.
- **Skip sugary drinks.** No juice is recommended for babies under 12 months. After 12 months, limit juice to 4 ounces per day and mix half water, half juice.

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- **Make water the family's drink of choice.** Drinking plenty of water cleanses your child's mouth and helps maintain saliva flow, which washes away bacteria.
- **Limit sticky fruits, treats, and candy.** The sugar in dried fruits, gummy candies, taffy, fruit roll-ups, and snack bars with honey or molasses will cling to your child's teeth and promote tooth decay. If your child eats these foods, brush their teeth or rinse with water afterward.
- **Get fluoride to prevent tooth decay.** Most children receive fluoride from tap water and toothpaste. A dentist or pediatrician may apply a fluoride varnish to your child's teeth 2-4 times per year.

Why healthy teeth matter?

Keeping your child's teeth healthy can prevent pain, tooth damage or loss, trouble eating that may affect growth, speech problems, teeth shifting, and ear infections.

Make cavity prevention a family priority

- **Be a role model.** Let your child watch you brush and floss.
- **Make dental visits a priority.** Mark dental appointments on the family calendar to show that regular check-ups are important.
- **Make tooth care fun.** Encourage good habits by adding fun to the tooth care routine, like brushing to music or marking progress on a calendar.



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Learn more
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caring for
your child's
teeth!

