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# Mouth Matters

Information to help keep your smile and your overall health the best they can be



## Preventive care for children and teens

It's never too soon to start good oral health habits. That's because proper childhood care can lead to a lifetime of happy smiles. Here's a brief look at some ways you can protect your children's pearly whites.

### Baby your baby

You can help your baby avoid oral health problems long before any teeth appear. After every feeding, be sure to gently wipe the baby's gums with a soft, damp washcloth or gauze pad.

Once their first teeth start coming in, babies can develop cavities from lengthy bottle feeding on milk, formula or juices. To prevent this, don't use the bottle as a pacifier. And if you need to give your baby a bottle at naptime or bedtime, be sure to feed only with plain water.

### Double trouble

Teething can be a painful experience — for you and your baby. To help relieve baby's discomfort, the makers of Crest<sup>®</sup> toothpaste suggest you lightly rub your child's gums with a clean finger or wet gauze pad, and try giving your baby a cool teething ring, too.

As your baby's first teeth make their arrival, you can start cleaning them every day with a children's soft-bristle toothbrush.

### The tooth fairy

Children usually lose their first baby tooth around age 6 or 7. Of course, some will be a little earlier and others a little later. Two things that seem to make the most difference are when children start getting their first teeth and when they lose their last baby tooth. This means that children who got their first tooth early, or finished getting all their baby teeth early, might start losing these teeth sooner than other children. Naturally, children who were late in getting teeth will probably also be late in losing them.



## Say Ahhh

Once children are about 1 year old, experts suggest it's time for their first visit to the dentist. You can make this new experience less scary by talking to your child about what the dentist will do. To make it more fun, try role-playing with your child as "dentist" and "patient" or read a story together about going to the dentist.

During this first visit, the dentist will:

- Ask about your child's medical history, eating habits and diet
- Check your child's oral hygiene
- Assess the need for fluoride supplements
- Examine the child's mouth for signs of tooth decay
- Talk about appropriate oral care

The biggest problem your dentist will look for is early childhood caries (ECC). This is an aggressive oral disease that affects children up to age 3. ECC damages teeth through the action of acid-producing bacteria in a child's mouth. While ECC is caused by many factors, a dentist can provide the best advice to help protect your child's teeth.

## Brush up on brushing

For infants, dentists and hygienists recommend that parents use a gentle, short, back-and-forth motion to brush children's teeth and remove plaque. Once children are old enough to understand how to rinse and spit, you can start using a pea-sized squirt of toothpaste on their toothbrush.

When children are older, here's how to get a handle on proper technique:

- To clean the outside and inside surfaces of teeth, hold the toothbrush at a 45-degree angle and use short, gentle strokes — starting at the gum line.

- For chewing surfaces, hold the brush flat and scrub back and forth.
- On the inside of front teeth, hold the brush vertically and use gentle up-and-down strokes.
- Don't forget to softly brush the tongue and roof of the mouth, too.
- Daily flossing also removes plaque and food particles between teeth and below the gum line.

## You are what you eat

It's simple: healthy eating leads to healthy teeth. Many snacks children eat can be harmful to their teeth. So, try to choose more nutritious snacks — which are better for your child's teeth. These include: vegetables, plain yogurt, fruits and cheese.

## Teen topics

Dental sealants provide an extra layer of defense against cavities on the chewing surfaces of back teeth. These sealants are made of plastic and are bonded to the teeth by your dentist. Perfect for teens with a sweet tooth!

Braces and retainers help solve a number of problems, including crooked or crowded teeth, overbites or underbites and incorrect jaw position. Generally speaking, the best time for braces is when your child is between ages 8 and 14. That's because a child's head and mouth are still growing in these years and teeth can be straightened more easily.

Teenagers playing sports should wear a properly fitted mouth guard. With more than 200,000 mouth and jaw injuries reported each year, mouth guards prevent cutting and bruising of lips and cheeks — especially for teens wearing braces.

## Time for teeth

Here's a general schedule showing when you can expect your baby's first teeth.

- Central incisor (front two upper and bottom teeth):  
6 – 12 months
- Lateral incisor (two teeth outside the upper and bottom fronts):  
9 – 16 months
- Canines (pointy teeth in upper jaw): 16 – 23 months
- First molars (upper and bottom back teeth):  
13 – 19 months
- Second molars (upper and bottom back teeth):  
22 – 33 months

Don't worry if your baby's teeth aren't on time. This schedule is only an average. But by age 3, all 20 of your child's primary teeth (also known as baby teeth) should be present and accounted for.



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