

Oral Health Tips



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smile discoveriesSM

A Child's First Visit to the Dentist

Regular dental visits are an important part of a child's oral health prevention program. Early examination and preventive care will protect your child's smile now and in the future.

At what age should I bring my child in to see the dentist?

The Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (APD) recommends that your child's first visit should coincide with when the first tooth comes in, usually between six and twelve months of age. To make their first visit a positive experience, make your appointment for a time when your child is most often well rested and relaxed. Treat the appointment as routine and bring along a favorite toy or blanket.

Why so early?

Professional evaluation, intervention, and treatment by a dentist are important components of maintaining good oral health. According to the APD, the most important reason is to begin a thorough prevention program because dental problems can begin early. The dentist will recommend the frequency of your child's follow up visits, depending upon the individual needs of your child. Children who are at increased risk of tooth decay, have unusual growth patterns, or who have poor oral hygiene may need more frequent visits.

What is a dentist looking for?

A dentist can check for tooth decay and assess your child's oral growth and development. A dentist can also teach you how to properly clean your child's teeth, determine if your child has any fluoride needs, and evaluate the potential effect of any harmful habits such as thumbsucking.

Another significant concern is early childhood caries (also know as baby bottle tooth decay or nursing caries). Babies and young children who nap or sleep at night with a bottle containing anything but plain water are at risk of developing tooth decay. Even liquids that are good for the baby, such as milk, formula, breast milk and fruit juices, all contain natural sugars that can promote decay. Starting at birth, clean your baby's gums with a soft cloth or gauze pad after each feeding. Encourage your child to drink from a cup as they approach their first birthday.

What are the benefits to early oral health care?

Children with healthy teeth chew food easily, learn to speak clearly, and smile with confidence. Children who start visiting the dentist at a young age are more likely to come to see visits as routine and be less anxious during regular checkups. Regular dental visits in childhood can also provide a foundation for a lifetime appreciation of taking care of their oral health.

Help keep your child's smile healthy and beautiful. Start your child now on a lifetime of good dental habits.

Sources: American Dental Association: www.ada.org; Academy of Pediatric Dentistry: www.aapd.org



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