



Child Oral Health

Cavity prevention is not the only concern parents should have when considering their children's oral health. Recent studies show that periodontal disease continues to plague millions of Americans, including children.

The best way to ensure that your child does not get cavities or gingivitis is to instill proper oral habits early. Good oral hygiene routines should be established as early as infancy and continued throughout life.

Registered dental hygienists may recommend these tips:

- Even before teeth begin to erupt, thoroughly clean your infant's gums after each feeding with a water-soaked infant washcloth or gauze pad to stimulate the gum tissue and remove food. When the baby's teeth begin to erupt, brush them gently with a small, soft-bristled toothbrush using a pea-sized amount of fluoridated toothpaste.
- A small amount of fluoridated toothpaste will help to inhibit decay. Fluoride is also found in mouth rinses, community water supplies, and in some foods.
- At age two or three, you can begin to teach your child proper brushing techniques. But remember, you will need to follow up with brushing and gentle flossing until age seven or eight, when the child has the dexterity to do it alone.
- Schedule regular oral health appointments starting around your child's first birthday. Your oral health professional will check for cavities in the primary teeth and watch for developmental problems, as well as help to create a positive experience that may alleviate fear at future visits.
- Allow and encourage your child to discuss any fears he or she might have about oral health visits, but do not mention the words 'hurt' or 'pain'. Saying "it won't hurt" instills the possibility of pain in the child's thought process.
- Determine if the water supply that serves your home is fluoridated. If there is not fluoride in your water, discuss supplement options with your dental hygienist.

Ask your dental hygienist about sealant applications to protect the chewing surfaces of your child's teeth; and about baby bottle tooth decay, which occurs when teeth are frequently exposed to sugar-containing liquids for long periods of time.