

PARENTS' GUIDE  
TO KEEPING LITTLE  
MOUTHS HEALTHY

Something to  
**s m i e**  
about

IN CELEBRATION OF NATIONAL CHILDREN'S DENTAL HEALTH MONTH

# Oral health and happiness.

The American Dental Hygienists' Association (ADHA) and ACT® Kids Anticavity products are teaming up to bring you this go-to guide to children's oral health. With the right dental hygiene routine at the right age, you and your family will have the tools you need for success. All so you can keep the little smiles in your lives healthy and happy from the start. [How great is that?](#)





# Not today, tooth decay!

Tooth decay (dental caries or cavities) is the most common chronic disease among youth in the United States. In fact, more than 45 percent of American children between the ages of 2 and 19 experience tooth decay in their primary or permanent teeth.<sup>1</sup>

Tooth decay can happen at any age.<sup>2</sup> From the moment the first baby tooth arrives there are steps you can take to keep it healthy. One way to spot tooth decay early is to look for white spots on teeth. This is often the first sign that the tooth is losing calcium and minerals needed to keep it strong. If left untreated, tooth decay can lead to pain, loss of teeth and serious infections.

Not to worry! A daily dental hygiene routine that includes the use of fluoride (when age appropriate) can help prevent decay from a young age. Part of that routine is also visiting your child's dental care office every six months to evaluate for cavities and other dental issues. As a parent or caregiver, following a dental health routine yourself is a great way to lead by example.

## Know your fluoride facts

Fluoride is a natural mineral with the ability to safely slow or stop cavities from forming by helping to strengthen the enamel layer on teeth.

When fluoride is absorbed into the weakened surface of a tooth, it strengthens the enamel, which is the hardest tissue in the human body.

Enamel needs fluoride to help fight the cavity-causing acids that form when bacteria in the mouth combine with sugars.

Fluoride is a vitally important tool in the fight to prevent cavities and help strengthen teeth as they develop.





## Be sugar aware

It's never too early in life, or too late, to think about sugar intake. Some foods and drinks that seem harmless are actually packed with cavity-causing sugar. Every five years since 1980, the Departments of Agriculture and Health and Human Services release an updated set of guidelines. The following highlights are from the current edition of *The Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025*.<sup>3</sup>

**Avoid added sugars**, especially with infants and young children who have virtually no room in their diet for added sugars.

**Before age 12 months**, 100% fruit or vegetable juices should not be given to infants.

**In the second year of life**, fruit juice is not necessary, and most fruit intake should come from eating whole fruit. If 100% fruit juice is provided, up to 4 ounces per day can fit in a healthy dietary pattern. Juices that contain added sugars should be avoided.

**Sugar-sweetened beverages** (e.g., regular soda, juice drinks [not 100% fruit juice], sports drinks, and flavored water with sugar) should not be given to children younger than age 2. They are not necessary in the child or adolescent diet nor are they a component of the USDA Dietary Patterns.



## 🕒 Drink more water

ADHA, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) agree that community water fluoridation is safe and works to prevent tooth decay. That's why fluoride has been added to drinking water since 1945. Studies have shown that community water fluoridation reduces tooth decay by 25%.<sup>4</sup> When your child drinks water every day, the fluoride makes it harder for bacteria in your mouth to make enamel-weakening acid.

**Not sure if your drinking water has fluoride?** Check with your local water utility agency or [with the CDC](#) to find out more about water fluoridation in your community. The peak health benefits happen when the drinking water has 0.7 mg/L of fluoride. If your community water supply does not have fluoride or you live on a private well, ask your child's doctor if you should get a prescription for fluoride drops or chewable tablets. Keep in mind that the fluoride and pH of bottled water vary depending on the source.

## 🕒 Discover more ways to fluoride

In addition to drinking water, fluoride can be found in other sources such as toothpaste and mouth rinse, which can help prevent tooth decay and make your child's teeth stronger. Amazingly, the new surface formed by this process is even stronger than the original.

As always, too much of a good thing can be harmful. Too much fluoride in the first eight years of life, when permanent teeth are being formed, can result in white lines or streaks on the teeth. The good news is that topical fluoride rinses and toothpastes are not strong enough to cause harm.





## Brush up on your daily oral health routine

According to the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, as soon as teeth start to appear up until age 3, using a tiny smear of toothpaste, similar to the size of a grain of rice, is best for brushing kids' teeth.<sup>5</sup>

From ages 3-6 years, you can move up to a pea-sized amount of toothpaste. At this age, it's best for an adult to assist the child and put the right amount of toothpaste on the brush. Always monitor brushing to avoid any excess swallowing of toothpaste.<sup>5</sup>



**Until age 3:** toothpaste amount the size of a grain of rice



**Until age 3-6:** toothpaste amount the size of a pea

**A fluoride varnish** is recommended beginning at six months of age. The varnish is applied by your dental care team or pediatrician every six months, or every three months for children at greater risk of tooth decay. The process is safe and does not hurt. Plus, it is a preventive service, which means most public and private health insurance plans cover it.

**Brush twice a day** and be sure to supervise children to ensure they brush once in the morning and once at night. Right after breakfast and before bedtime are the best times to brush. A good rule to remember is a toothbrush should be the last thing that touches your child's teeth every night.

**As children get older** let them use their own toothbrush. Until they have the dexterity to tie their own shoelaces, you will need to help them brush twice a day for at least two minutes. Try brushing their teeth first and then letting them finish. You may also want to consider an electric toothbrush for kids to aid in plaque removal.

**Parents should begin flossing children's teeth** as soon as two teeth touch, which is typically around ages 2-3. Flossing should be done once a day, preferably with the evening brushing. Until the age of 10, parents should assist children with flossing. Let them see you floss as well to show it is an essential step in daily dental care for all.



## Rinse like a pro

One pro tip is to have your child spit out toothpaste and use a fluoride rinse instead of water.

Rinsing with water lets all the fluoride benefits from toothpaste go down the drain.

As the #1 dental hygienist and dentist recommended kids' rinse brand,<sup>6\*</sup> ACT® offers a full line of fluoride-powered products for children and teens (age 6 and older). When compared to rinsing with water, a fluoride rinse can make teeth up to four times stronger. With ACT, a simple rinse once a day for one minute can help prevent up to 40 percent of future cavities compared to brushing alone.<sup>7\*\*</sup> This simple step delivers added protection to places brushing may miss.

ACT® Kids rinses are alcohol-free, and available in a range of flavors – with three matching toothpaste flavors to make kids' routines easy and fun. Plus, with the easy-squeeze measuring cup you can be sure your child is always getting the recommended dosage. ACT also has two, dye-free mouth rinse options available.

Special care should be taken when cleaning around teeth with braces and other orthodontic devices which can cause a build-up of plaque. Select a rinse formulated to help remove food particles, reduce cavities, prevent white spots and strengthen teeth.

ACT® Braces Care fluoride rinse has five gentle cleansers, and is formulated with aloe and sorbitol to soothe irritation spots.

Remember, a healthy mouth is the window to a healthy body for you and your kids! Any questions about oral care for your family? Your dental hygienist is here to support your smiles every step of the way.



# References

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\* Among OTC mouth rinses

\*\* Only applies to 0.05% sodium fluoride formulas



## About the American Dental Hygienists' Association

The American Dental Hygienists' Association (ADHA) is the largest national organization representing the professional interests of dental hygienists. Dental hygienists are preventive oral health professionals, licensed in dental hygiene, who provide educational, clinical and therapeutic services that support total health through the promotion of optimal oral health. To learn more about ADHA, dental hygiene or the link between oral health and general health, visit ADHA at [www.adha.org](http://www.adha.org).



## About ACT®

For over 30 years, ACT has been dedicated to improving oral health. From clinically tested fluoride rinses, to great-tasting kids toothpaste, to whitening and dry mouth products, everything they produce is backed by science and rooted in decades of experience. ACT IS PROUD TO BE THE #1 DENTAL HYGIENIST AND DENTIST RECOMMENDED OTC FLUORIDE BRAND.\* They are committed to making continued advancements in oral health for years to come. Visit [www.ACTOralCarePro.com](http://www.ACTOralCarePro.com) to learn more and download free educational resources.