



Healthy Teeth at Every Age



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Growing Up with Healthy Teeth



Everyone in your family can have a healthy mouth and teeth, no matter how young or old they are. People who have healthy teeth and gums can:

- Eat healthy foods without discomfort.
- Talk and smile easily.
- Not miss school or work because of mouth pain.

Dentist visits are important for a healthy mouth and teeth, but it takes more than that. What you do at home every day makes a big difference, and these everyday practices are easy.



What's in This Booklet?

This booklet will explain how to have a healthy mouth and teeth at every age. It discusses:

- How to take care of your child's teeth.
- How to take care of your teeth and gums at home every day.
- What to eat for good health and good teeth.
- What happens in dental visits at different ages.



Even before your baby's teeth start to grow in, you can help keep their mouth healthy. Wipe your baby's gums with a clean baby washcloth twice a day. Do this after their first morning feeding and right before you put them to bed. You can start right after they are born. Cleaning the gums helps remove the germs and sugars that can cause cavities. It also gets you and your baby into the habit of cleaning their mouth twice a day.



First Teeth

Your baby's teeth may grow in at around age 6 months. Sometimes the teeth start growing in as early as 4 months and as late as 12 months. Most babies have some teeth by the time they are a year old.

Teeth that are growing in can make babies uncomfortable. This is usually called teething pain. If your baby is teething, you may notice them drooling more, being extra fussy, or putting their fingers in their mouths more than usual. To lessen the pain of teething, you can:

- Give them a nontoxic plastic teething ring or toy. They can be chilled in the freezer. When you choose a teether, make sure it is made from nontoxic materials.
- Offer your baby a pacifier.

Don't use gels or creams that promise pain relief from teething. These don't work for very long, and they have health risks.

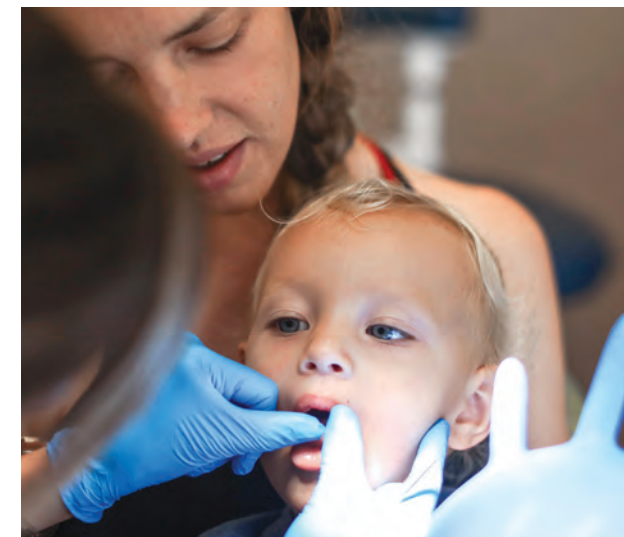
When to Start Brushing

Start brushing your baby's teeth as soon as they appear. Baby teeth can get cavities, and it's important to prevent them right from the start. Use a baby toothbrush and a smear of children's fluoride toothpaste about the size of a grain of rice. Brush your baby's teeth twice a day.

Preventing Cavities

The main food for your baby should be breast milk or formula, but these contain a type of sugar. To prevent the growth of cavity-causing germs, breast milk or formula should not be in your baby's mouth all the time. To help prevent cavities:

- Give bottles with breast milk or formula only when you are feeding your baby.
- Don't give babies juice until they are a year old.
- Wipe gums and teeth with a soft cloth after feeding.
- Don't let your baby fall asleep with a bottle or sippy cup.
- Don't share spoons or cups with your baby. Also don't use your mouth to clean off pacifiers. This is to prevent sharing the germs that are in your mouth.



At the First Visit

The dentist will look carefully at your baby's mouth and teeth. The dental team will show you how to take care of your baby's teeth, including brushing and flossing. They will talk to you about thumb sucking and using pacifiers. They may apply fluoride varnish to your baby's teeth.

When you leave the dental office, you should know when to bring your baby back. If your baby's mouth and teeth are healthy, the next checkup will likely be in about 6 months.

What Is Fluoride?

Fluoride is a mineral that makes tooth surfaces harder. It is added to toothpaste, tap water, and fluoride varnish to prevent cavities. A little bit of fluoride is not harmful.

When to See the Dentist

When your baby's first tooth grows in, make an appointment with the dentist. Or make the first appointment by your baby's first birthday, if the first tooth hasn't appeared by then. Starting checkups by the first birthday helps you and the dental team get to know each other.



Taking care of your young child's teeth mostly means keeping up the good habits you started when they were a baby. This includes brushing twice a day, flossing, and choosing healthy snacks and meals for your child. Dental checkups every 6 months are important too.



Fruit is a good snack food.

Why Care About Baby Teeth?

Babies need healthy teeth for talking and eating. Baby teeth also help the mouth and jaw grow the right way, so permanent teeth can grow in the right way. Even though baby teeth fall out, they must be cared for.

If cavities in baby teeth are not treated, the teeth can be lost. Baby teeth hold space for permanent teeth. If your baby or toddler loses teeth early, their jaw may not be big enough for their permanent teeth later. Infection from cavities in baby teeth can also affect the color and shape of permanent teeth.

Diet and Dental Health

Your toddler's diet changes to more solid foods and less breast milk or formula. Make sure that your child eats mostly fruits, vegetables, dairy, and lean protein foods. Sugary and sticky foods easily form the buildup that lets cavities form. Sticky foods can leave this buildup on the teeth for a long time.

Give your child meals and snacks at set times. If your child snacks all the time, then cavity-causing germs are in their mouth all the time. Water is the best drink between meals, for everyone in your family.

Toothbrushing for Toddlers

Your toddler likely wants to do things for themselves, but they are still too young to brush their own teeth. You should brush for them. This is to make sure all the teeth get clean on all sides.

- Use a soft, child-size toothbrush.
- Use just a smear of children's fluoride toothpaste the size of a grain of rice until your child is 3 years old. At age 3, you can use a dab of fluoride toothpaste the size of a small pea.
- Brush for 2 minutes. Use a timer or play a video or hum a song that is 2 minutes long.
- Ask your child to spit out toothpaste. They should not swallow it.
- Make brushing after breakfast a habit. Never miss brushing and flossing before bedtime.

When your young child is ready, you can let them brush for themselves, while you watch. If your child can print their own first name, they are probably ready to brush their own teeth.

Flossing for Young Children

You should start flossing your child's teeth as soon as there are 2 teeth next to each other. You will probably need to help them floss until they are grade-school age. You can use any type of floss, including what you use for yourself.

- Guide the floss between your child's teeth with a gentle rubbing motion.
- Move the floss down to the gums, and curve it around both sides of each tooth.
- Then remove the floss and go to the next tooth.

Dental Checkups

Here is what usually happens at a dental checkup for a young child:

- The dentist or his assistant will look for any problems with your child's gums and teeth. This includes cavities or early signs of cavities.
- They will check on whether your child's teeth and mouth are growing normally.
- Your child's teeth will be gently cleaned with tools and polished with a powered brush.



As your child reaches school age, they should start to do more to take care of their own teeth. Starting around age 7 or 8, your child may be able to brush twice a day without an adult watching. A few times a week, look at their teeth after they brush. Look to make sure they aren't missing any spots.

By the time your child is 10 or 11, they should be able to floss for themselves. Some children like using floss holders or disposable children's floss picks. These can make it easier to reach all the spaces between teeth.



Dental Checkups

Dental checkups are usually scheduled twice a year, but your dentist will tell you how often to bring your child in. During a dental checkup for a school-age child, the dental hygienist or dentist will clean and polish your child's teeth. They will also floss for your child. This is basically the same cleaning procedure that people have at every age.

Losing Baby Teeth

Around age 6 your child will start to lose their baby teeth. Permanent teeth will start to grow in to take their place. Nearly all of the permanent teeth should grow in by the time your child is 13 or 14.



Children older than 3 should use a dab of children's fluoride toothpaste the size of a small pea. A pea-sized dab of fluoride toothpaste is actually enough for adults, too.



Treatment to Prevent Cavities

The dentist may recommend a treatment to help keep your child's teeth healthy. Two different kinds of treatments may be put on children's teeth:

- **Sealant.** The back teeth have creases and small grooves where germs can hide. A sealant is a thin plastic coating that is put on the chewing surfaces of the back teeth. Sealants prevent cavities and can last for years. Having sealants put on does not hurt.
- **Topical fluoride.** This is a liquid that the dental team puts on the teeth to help prevent cavities.

X-Rays When Needed

Dentists use x-rays to find problems with the teeth and jaws that aren't easily seen. People, especially children, should only have x-rays when they are needed. This is to limit exposure to radiation, which can lead to cancer. If the dentist says your child should have x-rays, ask why.

Crowded Teeth or Bite Problems

Many people have crowded teeth. These may never cause problems. But crowded teeth make brushing and flossing difficult, which can lead to cavities. In some cases, crowded teeth should be fixed to prevent health problems.

How the teeth and jaws come together is often called the bite. If your child's bite could cause health problems, the dentist will talk to you about how this may be treated.



When children become teenagers, they gain more freedom over their personal lives. This usually means they take most of the responsibility for their own dental health. Starting good habits in early childhood can help teenagers keep their teeth healthy as they grow into adulthood.



Making Time for Good Dental Health

Teenagers and adults are busier than children and spend less time at home. This can make it harder to eat healthy foods at regular times and limit sugary drinks and snacks. It can also make it harder to brush and floss every day and to make and keep dental appointments. But it's important to make time for these daily practices. They are the basis for having healthy teeth throughout adult life.

If You Have Braces

When you have braces, taking good care of your teeth and gums is extra important. It's easy for food to get trapped behind braces, which can lead to cavities, stains, or white spots on your teeth. Your dentist or orthodontist will give you advice on food to avoid, as well as how to clean around your braces. You may get special tools to help with this, like floss threaders.



About Wisdom Teeth

Years after most permanent teeth have grown in, some people get wisdom teeth. These are chewing teeth at the far back part of the mouth. They can grow in around 17 years or older, or they may never grow in. Some wisdom teeth never cause problems. For some people, wisdom teeth can crowd other teeth or cause other health problems. If wisdom teeth could cause problems for you or your teenager, your dentist may advise you to have them removed.

Smoking and Vaping

Most people know that smoking stains teeth. Smoking also causes cavities, gum disease, and cancers of the mouth and throat. For the health of your mouth and your whole body, the best choice is not to smoke.

Using vaping devices (e-cigarettes) may also harm your mouth and teeth. These new products tend to cause tooth decay and gum disease. They dry out the mouth, which can lead to more cavity-causing germs. Ingredients in vape juice may also lead to more tooth decay.



Seeing your dentist at least every 6 months helps you have a healthy mouth throughout your life. You can also keep your mouth healthy by practicing good dental health every day at home. These practices don't cost a lot of money. When they are part of your routine, they won't feel like they take a lot of time. These practices start as early as birth, and you should keep them up through adulthood.



Brushing

Brush every morning and at bedtime, for 2 minutes each time. Use a toothbrush with soft bristles that fits your mouth. Choose toothpaste that has fluoride. After age 6, a small, pea-size dab of toothpaste is enough. Get a new toothbrush every 3 months.

Flossing

Clean between your teeth at least once a day. Dental floss is what most people use, but there are other tools designed to clean between teeth, such as very small brushes, dental picks, and water flossers (like the Waterpik).



Healthy Foods

A healthy diet provides the vitamins and minerals that help keep your teeth strong and your mouth healthy. Choose foods like these:

- Fresh fruits and vegetables
- Unsweetened and unflavored milk and other dairy products
- Foods with lots of lean protein, such as chicken, fish, or tofu

Avoid starchy, sugary, and sticky foods. You may choose to eat these in small amounts, less often. Eating snacks all the time also makes cavities more likely. At mealtimes, water or milk are the best drinks for adults and children. Sodas, fruit juices, and sports drinks contain sugar, which can cause cavities.



Dental Care and COVID-19

COVID-19 is a very contagious disease that has changed everyone's daily lives. To lessen the spread of COVID-19, dentists now do some things differently. Here are some ways that dentist visits have changed:

- The office will be cleaned carefully to remove the virus that causes COVID-19.
- There will not be toys or magazines in the waiting room.
- The dentist and office staff will wear face masks and other protective gear for their safety and yours.
- If you do not feel well, you should not keep your appointment. Call and reschedule it.
- You may have some visits over the phone or web, instead of going to the dentist's office.

If you go to the dentist's office for a visit, you will probably be asked to:

- Not bring anyone extra with you. When you bring a child in for an appointment, other family members should stay home.
- Say if you are feeling sick.
- Have your temperature taken.
- Wear a face mask while you wait and after your treatment.
- Stay at least 6 feet away from people who don't live with you, when you can.



When to Call the Dentist

Your dentist can treat mouth or tooth pain or injuries. If you have a painful or serious problem, call your dentist right away. You will be told what to do when you call. If you have checkups at the same dental office every time, you will know who to call when there is an emergency. The dental team will already know you and know what your dental health has been like.

Contact your dentist right away if you or a family member have:

- A tooth that is cracked, broken, or knocked out.
- A tongue, cheek, or lip that won't stop bleeding.
- A swollen face.
- A tooth that is painful.
- Red, swollen gums.

Pregnancy

If you are pregnant, you should make sure to take care of your dental health. Taking good care of your teeth and gums makes you healthier overall.

Pregnancy Can Affect Your Dental Health

Pregnancy can cause some changes in your mouth. Your gums may become more puffy and tender. You may be more likely to get cavities. Your dentist can help with these problems.

If you vomit because of morning sickness, don't brush your teeth right away, because this can expose your teeth to more acid.

Instead, rinse your mouth and spit. You can use plain water or 1 cup of water with 1 teaspoon of baking soda. Wait 30 minutes before brushing.

Seeing the Dentist Is Safe

It is safe to have dental treatments while you are pregnant. This includes:

- Teeth cleanings.
- Fillings (fixing cavities).
- Crowns (fixing cracked or broken teeth).
- Other treatments, including scaling and root planing (special cleaning for deep pockets between the tooth and gum).

Most medicines used during dental treatments are also safe to take when you are pregnant.



Talk to the Dental Team

Tell your dentist that you are pregnant. Tell the dentist about all the medicines, vitamins, and supplements you take.



For More Information

For more information about caring for your mouth and teeth, contact:

The Office of Dental Health

(510) 208-5910

DentalHealth@acgov.org

dental.acphd.org

We Can Help You Find a Dentist

If you would like to be connected with a dentist, contact the Medi-Cal Dental program at:

1-800-322-6384

8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Monday through Friday

If you are hearing impaired, please call **1-800-735-2922** for Teletext Typewriter (TTY) assistance.

Ask the operator to call the toll-free line at:

1-800-322-6384

smilecalifornia.org



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