

FACTSHEET

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Caring for your child's teeth

Tooth decay: The main cause of tooth decay is an acid attack on the surfaces of the teeth. This acid is produced by bacteria which cling to the surface of the teeth in a film called dental plaque. Sweet, sticky, sugary foods encourage the plaque to make acid which causes tooth decay and bleeding gums.

Cleaning teeth

Children need to learn how to clean their teeth. Start off by giving your baby a small toothbrush as a toy - bath time is a good time. Start to clean your baby's teeth as soon as they appear. Use a small, soft toothbrush and water. When the child is older, introduce small amounts of junior fluoride toothpaste onto the brush. Just put a small wipe of toothpaste on the brush. It is best that your child cleans their teeth the last thing before bed.

It is hard for children under ten to clean their teeth properly. You will need to help at least once a day. If the bacteria have been on the teeth for a long time, the gums may bleed when brushed. This gingivitis tells you that the gums are unhealthy. To get them healthy again the gums need to be cleaned more often, even if they bleed when brushed.

Dental floss

You may need to clean between your child's teeth with dental floss. Ask your dentist to show you how to use the floss properly.

When to visit the dentist

Take your child to the dentist regularly, starting from about one year of age. Going to the dentist is safe and can save you money in the long run.

Tips to prevent dental disease

Here are some tips to prevent decay and sore gums for children:

- Avoid putting infants and young children down with a bottle. Always ensure feeding has ceased before your child goes to sleep to avoid early infant tooth decay
- Drink fluoridated tap water every day. If you are not sure if your local water is fluoridated, check with your local council
- Avoid eating sugary sticky foods, especially between meals
- Avoid sweet drinks and juices, especially between meals
- Give your child foods which make them chew
- Brush twice a day - after breakfast and before bed (use a small toothbrush and a small amount of fluoridated, junior toothpaste)
- If there's no toothbrush, rinse with water
- Use dental floss daily from about 3-4 years of age
- Visit your dentist regularly
- Please do not put honey on dummies to get children to sleep.

Dental emergencies

Toothache

If your child has a toothache or a hole in a tooth, take your child to the dentist immediately. Tooth decay can easily lead to an infection which is very painful for your child.

Bleeding

If your child's gums bleed during tooth-brushing take your child to the dentist as soon as possible. This bleeding can be caused by lack of proper care for the teeth, or it may be a symptom of a medical condition. Your dentist can check this and advise you.

Injury

If your child falls and hurts a tooth take them to the dentist quickly. If the teeth are loose, especially the permanent teeth, they need to be replaced in the socket and splinted as soon as possible, preferably within the hour. The sooner the tooth is back in place the better its chance of survival in the long term. Do not attempt to replace a baby tooth.

If a permanent tooth is knocked out

- Take your child to the nearest dentist or hospital with the tooth/teeth in milk or saline.
- If unable to get your child to a dentist within one hour:
 - Hold the tooth by the crown
 - Rinse the tooth, if dirty, in milk or saline (use water as a last resort)
 - Do not scrub or touch the root of tooth
 - Replace the tooth in the socket
 - Make sure that the tooth is not back to front- facial surface towards the front.
You can check this against the next tooth or someone else's front tooth.
- Take your child to a dentist or hospital straight away so they can splint the tooth in place.

Remember:

- Brush twice a day with a fluoride tooth paste, (low fluoride paste for under six year olds)
- Drink fluoridated water every day and limit the drinking of soft drinks and fruit juices
- Visit your dental health provider regularly.
- Limit sweet snacks between meal