

NEXT STEPS:

DENTAL CARE FOR CHILDREN 1 - 4 YEARS

The American Dental Association and First Impressions recommend that a child's first dental visit take place six months after the first tooth erupts, or by one year of age, whichever comes first. This is an ideal time for our team to evaluate your child's oral, dental, and nutritional health, as well as diagnose any existing or potential problems.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

- Examination this early allows our team to intervene before oral health is compromised by poor oral hygiene (cleaning) or improper feeding habits.
- At these visits, any signs of cavities such as "white spot" lesions around the necks and inside surfaces of the upper front teeth can be detected. These white chalky areas near the gum line are the beginning of the cavity process and are called decalcifications. They are caused by acid producing bacteria (germs) and are the main cause of cavities.
- Brushing techniques may be modified depending on your child's age. An infant's teeth and gums can be cleaned with a piece of clean gauze, cloth, or infant toothbrush twice a day.
- Brushing baby teeth can be quite challenging and some creative approaches such as "taking turns" or "rewards" may need to be used. The good news is that the child will become more comfortable with it the more it is done.



WHAT YOU NEED TO DO:

- If you haven't already, schedule your first visit to the dentist six months after the eruption of the first tooth, or by one year of age.
- Prepare your child for their visit by focusing on the positive and engaging your child as much as possible into yours and their oral hygiene routines.
- Don't let your child become aware of any negative feelings or fears you might have about going to the dentist.
- Prepare a list of questions or concerns you have before the visit.
- After the initial visit, schedule your child's next appointment according to the schedule we recommend. If your child has special healthcare needs, we may recommend more frequent appointments based on your child's needs or susceptibility to cavities.

BRUSHING AND ORAL CARE

- For children under two years of age, brush teeth with a soft-bristled toothbrush and warm water, or a smear of fluoridated toothpaste after breakfast and right before bedtime. The most important part of brushing your child's teeth is making sure the plaque is brushed off of them.
- For children over two years of age, use a small, pea-sized amount of fluoridated toothpaste and encourage them to spit it out. Don't let them rinse with water. Fluoride that stays on the teeth can help prevent tooth decay.
- Parents should assist children with tooth brushing to make sure the plaque has been removed. Children need help until their fine motor skills are more developed. This is usually around age eight, or until they can tie a double-knot in their shoe laces.

NEXT STEPS DENTAL CARE FOR CHILDREN 1-4 YEARS (CONT...)

- When helping a child brush, we recommend brushing the upper and lower teeth separately. We call it the “upstairs” and the “downstairs”. By brushing them separately, you naturally can reach the gum line better, which is where most plaque tends to accumulate.
- If you have well water, have your water tested for fluoride content and talk to your dentist about fluoride supplementation.
- It’s a good idea to have your child drinking from a cup by the age of 12 to 14 months.
- Limit your child’s consumption of any beverages that contain sugar, as well as lengthy or frequent feedings of formula, breast milk, or any other sugary fluids that can promote tooth decay.
- Avoid snacks such as fruit snacks and other sticky foods in between meals. Try to stick with snacks like string cheese and vegetables.
- While milk is good for you, it can promote cavities because it contains a form of sugar called “lactose”. So, be careful as to how often you are giving your child milk.
- We recommend drinking water in between meals. It’s ok to give milk or real fruit juice with a meal.
- Don’t share eating utensils or clean a pacifier off with your saliva as you may introduce new bacteria into your child’s mouth.
- Children at this age may still continue oral habits such as thumb sucking or a pacifier habit. While most children stop by themselves between the ages of two and five, some may need some extra guidance. As a general rule, it is a good idea to discontinue the habit before the first adult teeth erupt or half way through the child’s kindergarten year. Your dentist or hygienist can give you some helpful tips for stopping these habits.

TAKE STEPS TO REDUCE THE RISK OF INJURY TO YOUR CHILD’S GROWING TEETH:

- Do what you can to minimize your child’s risk of an oral injury and know what to do if an injury should occur.
- Never attempt to reinsert a baby tooth that has fallen out.
- Use an age-appropriate car seat at all times.
- Don’t place your child in the basket of a shopping cart.
- Use safety locks on cabinets and doors.
- Keep appliances and dangling cords out of your child’s reach.
- Keep safety gates at the top and bottom of stairways.
- Always secure and childproof windows above the ground floor.
- Supervise your child on the playground and make sure the equipment is properly working, maintained, and is age appropriate for your child.
- Make sure your child wears a helmet when cycling, scooting, or boarding of any kind.
- Put emergency contact numbers in a prominent place so you or any caregivers have easy access to them.

