



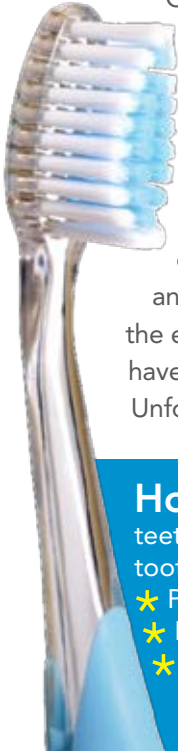
Dental Health

Parent - Family Newsletter

February 2010

Tooth Time

THIS MONTH marks National Children’s Dental Health Month, and we’ve challenged your child’s teacher to spend some time covering the topic of dental hygiene in the classroom. Children can learn a lot in school about the importance of dental hygiene, but the best place to instill good dental hygiene habits is at home.



Oral health is critical to the physical and emotional development of your child. Having a squeaky clean, healthy smile can reduce the risk of developing diseases like diabetes and heart disease, and you can’t overlook the effect healthy teeth can have on a child’s self-esteem. Unfortunately, tooth decay, or

dental caries, is a reality for America’s youth. In fact, the latest study of oral health trends by the National Center for Health Statistics found that instances of tooth decay are actually on the rise among children ages 2–5.

When Dr. Mary Hayes, a Chicago-based pediatric dentist and spokesperson for the American Dental Association, shares this fact with the parents of her patients, their first reaction is usually surprise. “A lot of parents think young children can’t get tooth decay,” she says. “But the fact is tooth decay is more common than asthma or hay fever.”

Fortunately, tooth decay is largely preventable by establishing healthy dental hygiene habits. Follow these five tips to help improve the health of your child’s teeth and gums:

1. See the Dentist Early and Regularly

Experts agree that parents should schedule their child’s first dental appointment at age 1, and take their child to the dentist every six months. Even at age 1, dentists can begin to see the effects of decay and other dental problems and can talk parents through proper brushing and flossing techniques.

As your child gets older, your dentist will likely suggest fluoride treatments and dental sealants to prevent cavities from forming. Remember, preventive measures like regular checkups and fluoride treatments are less expensive than getting a cavity filled.

2. Brush and Floss With Your Child

One mistake many parents make is assuming their child can brush their teeth on their own. Children don’t develop the motor skills needed for proper brushing until age 6 or 7, so until then, it’s important for parents to brush their child’s teeth. For flossing, the fine motor skills don’t develop until about age 12. If you have problems getting your child to sit still to properly brush their teeth, your pediatric dentist can help you with some techniques.

- How to Brush:** To remove decay-causing plaque, brush teeth twice daily. Follow this procedure, using a soft toothbrush and toothpaste with fluoride (about the size of a pea is all you need):
- ★ Place the toothbrush at a 45-degree angle against the gums.
 - ★ Move the brush back and forth in gentle short strokes.
 - ★ Brush the outer tooth surface, the inner tooth surface and the chewing surfaces of the teeth.
 - ★ Gently brush the tongue to remove bacteria.

Source: American Dental Association

Once children are older and brushing and flossing on their own, they'll still need gentle and consistent reminders from you to take care of their teeth.

3. The Rule on Flossing

When does your child need to start flossing? Some experts say at age 1; others say when two teeth touch each other. Others repeat the old adage, "You don't have to floss all of your teeth, only the ones you want to keep." Talk to your child's dentist to get his or her opinion.

4. Watch the Diet

Diet is another important factor in maintaining healthy teeth. Certain foods can sabotage one's efforts for a cavity-free mouth.

Dr. Hayes explains that when bacteria, or plaque, comes into contact with sugar in the mouth, acid is produced, which attacks the teeth for 20 minutes or more and can eventually result in tooth decay.

Limit snacks between meals, and choose healthy, natural snacks over sugary, processed ones the majority of the time. It's also important to limit sodas, sports drinks and even fruit juices, opting instead for water.

Snack on This, Not That

Craving something sweet? Pick fruit over candy and cookies. Not only is fruit better for your teeth, but it's more filling, too.

Craving something salty? Choose cheese or nuts (not coated in sugar) over pretzels and chips.

Craving something ice-cold and refreshing? Freeze a batch of grapes for a much more satisfying snack than a sticky, sugary popsicle.

Need to quench your thirst? Nothing beats water or milk. Staying away from sodas (even diet ones) and other sugar-laden beverages will protect teeth for years to come.

For a teenager who makes his or her own food choices, you can still do your part by keeping healthy choices stocked in the pantry and refrigerator.

5. It's Never Too Late to Start

Think the damage is already done? It's never too late to start healthy dental habits. Beginning a healthy regimen now can prevent future damage, and Dr. Hayes explains that it's possible even to reverse previous damage. "Before the tooth starts to break down and a filling becomes necessary, you can reverse the damage," she says. "You can re-mineralize that area."

However, she says, it's essential to catch the decay when it first starts, which requires regular visits to the dentist. "The first sign of a cavity is a little white spot on the tooth," she says. "Ideally we'd find these white spots early, and then do the appropriate intervention." For Dr. Hayes, that usually means prescribing fluoride treatments, reviewing the child's diet and encouraging the child—and the parent—to do a better job with brushing and flossing.



How to Floss

To remove plaque from between the teeth where a toothbrush cannot reach, follow these steps for proper flossing:

- ✦ Break off about 18 inches of floss and wind most of it around one of your middle fingers. Wind the remaining floss around the same finger of the opposite hand. This finger will take up the floss as it becomes used.
- ✦ Hold the floss tightly between your thumbs and forefingers. Guide the floss between your teeth using a gentle rubbing motion. Never snap the floss into the gums.
- ✦ When the floss reaches the gum-line, curve it into a C shape against one tooth. Gently slide it into the space between the gum and the tooth.
- ✦ Hold the floss tightly against the tooth. Gently rub the side of the tooth, moving the floss away from the gum with up and down motions.
- ✦ Repeat this method on the rest of your teeth, including the back side of the last tooth.

Source: American Dental Association

