



Pediatric Oral Hygiene and Dental Care

How do I clean my baby's teeth and gums?

- Wipe the gums with a soft, clean cloth after the first and last feedings of the day. This helps wipe away sugar and bacteria that can cause future cavities.

When will my baby get their first tooth?

- Most children will get their first tooth between 6-12 months of age. It can vary widely, so do not be alarmed if your child is older or younger than this.
- Teething does not cause fever, rash or diarrhea, though babies can be sore and irritable.
 - Try a teething ring made of solid rubber; avoid rings that are liquid-filled or plastic.
- Most children should have all 20 of their baby teeth in by age 3, but again this is variable.

When should I take my child to the dentist for the first time?

- It is recommended to establish a dental home no later than 12 months of age.
- In most cases, the first few visits will be an evaluation and consultation rather than a cleaning. We will answer whatever questions you might have and identify any major concerns as soon as possible.

How and when do I brush my child's teeth?

- Every child is different and will respond to a hygiene routine in their own way.
- In general, try to brush twice daily; after breakfast and before bedtime.
- Find a consistent, comfortable place and position to brush your child's teeth.
 - One common technique is to sit on the floor and have the child lay back with their head in your lap, like a dental chair. Some children may like standing on a stool so they can look in the mirror.
 - Try having the child make an "Eee" sound to help brush the front teeth and an "Ahh" sound to help brush the back teeth. Making silly animal noises might be another fun option.
- Use a child-sized toothbrush with soft bristles. Letting them pick a brush with their favorite cartoon character can help keep it fun!
 - It is best to change toothbrushes about twice a year, as the bristles can wear out.
- Infants and children younger than 3 should use a small smear of toothpaste (grain of rice), and it is ok if it stays in their mouth after brushing.
- Children ages 3-6 should use a pea-sized amount of toothpaste, spitting it out afterwards.
- In general, children should have help brushing their teeth until they can tie their own shoes (usually age 7-8), so it is good to establish a routine early.

Do I need to floss my child's teeth?

- A toothbrush can only reach so far between the teeth, so it is important to floss even if there are no tight contacts. Try using hand-held flossers and clean between a few teeth at a time, working up to cleaning between all the teeth. You can purchase flossers that are multi-colored, flavored, or even shaped like animals and other kid-friendly objects to make it more fun.

What about fluoride?

- Regular and frequent exposure to small amounts of fluoride is the best way to protect the teeth against cavities. This exposure can be readily accomplished through drinking water that has been optimally fluoridated and brushing with fluoride toothpaste twice daily.
- If you live in town, your water likely has fluoride in it and your children won't need to supplement. If you have well water it is recommended to have it checked, then consult your dentist to determine if your child would benefit from fluoride supplements.
- We recommend a fluoride varnish treatment at each cleaning to give the teeth a boost against cavities.

Aren't they just baby teeth?

- It is important to keep baby teeth cavity-free even though they will eventually fall out.
- Baby teeth help children to eat healthy food, develop their speech, and maintain space for their adult teeth.
- Bacteria that cause cavities in baby teeth stay in the mouth and may cause cavities in permanent teeth.
- Treating cavities in baby teeth can reduce the risk of toothache or infection, as well as reduce bacterial transfer to adult teeth.

When will my child lose their first tooth?

- Most children will lose their first tooth around age 6, but this can vary by a year or more. This can also be quite variable among siblings. It is generally not a concern if a child takes longer to lose their first tooth.

How can thumb-sucking affect my child's teeth?

- Thumb-sucking and pacifier use can cause problems with proper growth of the mouth and the alignment of teeth. These problems can lead to problems with speech and feeding.
- Most children stop thumb-sucking between two and four years old, though it is recommended to stop this as soon as possible. Try one or more of the following:
 - Identify and reduce causes of anxiety or insecurity that may be causing the behavior.
 - Praise your child for not sucking their thumb.
 - Place a bandage or sock on their hands at night.
 - Use a product marketed for thumb-sucking cessation, such as Stop-The-Bite nail polish.
 - You can purchase a series of progressively smaller pacifiers to wean your child off them.

Should I be concerned if my child has a lip/tongue tie?

- We all have muscle attachments, called frenums, between the lips, tongue, and bones that support the teeth. If one or more of these frenums are too tight, they can cause issues with tooth position as well as speech and eating. It can also affect a baby's ability to nurse properly. We recommend discussing this with your pediatrician to determine if a frenectomy procedure is right for your child.

What are sealants and how do they help my child's teeth?

- Most back teeth have deep grooves and fissures on their chewing surfaces. These areas are at higher risk of cavities because they are difficult to keep clean. A sealant is a non-invasive protective coating that makes the surface of the tooth smoother and seals out cavity-causing bacteria. Sealants do not protect the sides of teeth from cavities, so flossing is still just as important. Sealants can chip or fall off, so we may need to touch them up as your child grows. We recommend placing sealants on all permanent back teeth as soon as they are erupted, starting around age 6.

Please contact us at 507-345-7786 with any further questions or concerns about your child's teeth.