

## DENTAL HYGIENE FOR KIDS

Your child's well-being is your biggest concern, and their oral hygiene is an important part of their overall health. The care of your child's teeth and gums begins with you - - you can set them on the right path for a lifetime of excellent oral hygiene.

### Oral Hygiene for Infants

Babies are born with all their teeth - you can't see them because they are hidden in the gums. Baby teeth start to break through the gums around 6 months, but it is important to start good oral care for infants even before the first tooth comes in. From healthy gums come healthy teeth.

- Wipe your baby's gums with a soft washcloth after feeding. This helps remove the bacteria that can cause tooth decay.
- Once they begin to erupt, brush teeth twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste in an amount no more than a smear the size of a grain of rice – use a soft-bristle toothbrush.
- Take the bottle away after your child finishes drinking to prevent baby bottle tooth decay. Baby bottle tooth decay can happen when babies drink milk, formula, or juice from bottles over long periods of time or fall asleep with the bottle.
- Schedule your child's first dental appointment before their first birthday or after his or her first baby tooth is visible, whichever comes first. This visit is like a well-baby visit with your pediatrician.

### Oral Hygiene for Children

As kids grow up, their oral hygiene habits should grow with them.

Kids have all their baby teeth by the age of 3. These are called **primary** teeth. Baby teeth start falling out around age 6; that's when the **permanent**, or adult, teeth start coming in. Gaps between baby teeth are normal. They make room for the permanent teeth. Most permanent teeth come in by age 13.

### Establishing the Best Oral Hygiene Routine for Children

Here are some tips to help keep your child's teeth healthy and strong starting at age 3:

- Use a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste and make sure your child spits it out after brushing
- Be sure your child brushes for at least 2 minutes twice a day
- Start flossing as soon as teeth touch, or even earlier to help build good habits.
- Help your child brush and floss, and remind him or her to pay attention to the back teeth.
- Visit the dentist every 6 months.

### Oral Hygiene for Preteens

As children grow older and more of their permanent teeth come in, a rigorous daily dental hygiene routine is crucial to keeping teeth and gums healthy. However, it can be difficult to keep preteens interested in their oral care.

**Try these tips to keep your child on track:**

- As preteens become more conscious of their appearance, it can be helpful to remind them that good oral care can help them look and feel better.
- Remind your child to brush twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste for a full two minutes which not only fights cavities and strengthens teeth, but also gives older kids the confidence of having fresh breath. A power toothbrush might make brushing more fun for preteens.
- Flossing is extremely important at this point as most permanent teeth have erupted and cleaning between them will help prevent cavities and keep their mouth fresh.
- Encourage children who play sports to wear a mouth guard to protect their teeth from injuries.
- Make sure kids who wear braces use a power brush and floss very thoroughly to avoid white spots on teeth when braces come off.