



Good Dental Habits from Baby to Teen

Dental Health for Babies and Toddlers

The American Dental Association recommends kids start getting checkups at about age 1, or when their first tooth appears.

It's important to care for your child's teeth and gums before their first tooth appears. Though they'll eventually lose them, baby teeth help a child speak and chew well, and also create a path for the permanent teeth that follow. To care for baby and toddler dental health:

- Brush your child's teeth with a little water as soon as their first tooth appears. If your baby has no teeth yet, clean the gums at least two times a day -- after breakfast and after the last feeding of the day. Even better -- clean your baby's gums after every feeding.
- Don't put your child to sleep with a baby bottle of milk, juice, formula, or other sweetened liquid. If they need to sleep with a bottle, fill it with water.
- For kids older than 2, supervise as they brush their teeth. Put a pea-sized dot of toothpaste on a soft-bristled brush and be sure to teach them to spit the toothpaste out -- swallowing too much fluoride toothpaste can permanently stain teeth.
- If you're giving your young one medicine, brush his or her teeth afterward. The sugar found in some medicines can be converted into enamel-damaging acid.
- To soothe pain from teething, try letting your child chew on a clean teething ring, cool spoon, or a cold wet washcloth. You can also try rubbing your child's gums with a clean finger.
- Which dentist you choose for your child is up to you, but it's useful to know that pediatric dentists receive two to three years of additional dental training to help them address the dental health needs of kids, from infant to adolescent.

Dental Health for Tweens and Teens

Though your preteen and teenager will still receive care from their pediatric dentist, essentially their basic dental health needs are similar to adults. Teens, as well as adults should:

- Maintain a healthy diet rich in fruits and veggies, and low in sweetened foods and drinks.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Limit between-meal snacks -- especially those high in sugar.
- Brush twice a day with fluoride toothpaste that has the American Dental Association's Seal of Acceptance.
- Floss at least once daily.
- Get regular dental checkups and cleanings.

And be sure your kids know that if those pearly whites are to last a lifetime they're not to be used as ice crushers, fork tine straighteners, and potato chip bag openers.

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