Healthy Mouth, Healthy Child

Caring for children's oral health should start as early as a mother's pregnancy, as an expectant mother's oral health may have an impact on the health of her baby.

Parents and caregivers can help keep newborns' and infants' mouths healthy by lightly massaging their gums with a damp washcloth. When teeth appear, lightly brush with a soft child-sized toothbrush with a smear of fluoridated toothpaste. Around a child's first birthday, it is important to have his or her first dental visit for an oral exam.

When children reach preschool age, help brush their teeth with a pea-sized amount of fluoridated toothpaste and floss in between teeth once they grow in next to each other. School-aged children should brush at least twice a day for two minutes at a time, continue flossing and use a mouthwash.

There are several other ways to care for a child's oral health. Make sure children wear a mouthguard during sports, practice good eating habits and continue with regular visits to the dentist for checkups.

Did you know?

Children should brush at least twice a day for two minutes at a time.

Quick bites

Additional tips for your child's oral health:

- **Prevent baby bottle decay.** Never let a child fall asleep with a bottle, unless it contains water. Sugary liquids can speed up decay in the mouth.
- **Reduce the risk of spreading germs.** Never share feeding utensils with a child or clean a baby's pacifier with anything other than warm, soapy water.
- **Monitor use of pacifiers and thumb-sucking.** If thumb-sucking or pacifier use continues after age 4, it can alter a child's teeth and jaw development. It can also result in an overbite or teeth that come in crooked.
- **Help establish good oral health habits.** Let children brush and floss with supervision and assistance until they can safely do so by themselves—generally around age 7.

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Healthy Smile, Happy Life

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