

How Healthy Is My Child's Smile? By Dr. Allan J. Milewski, D.D.S.

Taking care of your child's oral health begins early. Typically, infants erupt their first baby tooth around six months of age. Even though baby teeth will eventually fall out to make room for permanent teeth, keeping your child's baby teeth healthy is critically important. Baby teeth allow your child to chew and get proper nutrition. They will affect how your child speaks, and will keep a space in their jaw for their adult teeth. If your child loses a baby tooth too soon, it can cause their adult teeth to be crooked or crowded.

Even as an infant, nutrition plays a vital role in keeping teeth healthy. Avoid sugary drinks for your baby. Don't let them fall asleep with a bottle, and even before you see their first tooth, wipe their gums with clean gauze after feedings. When you see that first tooth erupt, start brushing! It is a good idea to take your baby to the dentist six months after they get their first tooth. That first visit should be a fun visit for your child, setting the tone for a lifetime of visits.

As your child continues to grow, nutrition continues to be very important for a healthy smile. Limit the consumption of foods high in sugar and carbohydrates. Encourage healthy snacks and drinks. Limit the amount of pop your child drinks, and beware of the high sugar content of many juice drinks. If your family drinks bottled water, use bottled water with fluoride to help cut down on the risk of decay.

Most children under the age of six should still be supervised when brushing their teeth. Setting a timer or using an electric toothbrush with a built in timer can be a helpful tool for your child to understand how long to brush. I always encourage parents of older children to look at their children's teeth after their child has brushed...sometimes a child's perceptions of "brushing well" may need a little parental fine tuning. Be sure to use a soft bristled brush, and a fluoridated toothpaste and brush at least twice a day. Remind your child to rinse their mouth out with water after lunch at school, when brushing is often not an option

It is very important that you maintain a regular schedule of visits with your child to your dentist. Always have your dentist or dental hygienist go over proper brushing and flossing techniques with your child. Even if your child has heard these techniques before, they will listen to what is being said differently as they get older. Fluoride treatments by your dental professional are a great way to protect your child's teeth from decay, as are dental sealants.

Above all else, parents can be a great role model for your child by taking great care of your own teeth. By brushing and flossing, and seeing your dentist on a regular basis, you show your child that taking care of their teeth should be an important part of their daily routine.

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