

## **GETTING A HEAD START KEEPING YOUR CHILD'S TEETH HEALTHY**

**WHEN SHOULD DENTAL CARE START:** Proper dental care begins before a baby's first teeth appear. Just because you can't see the teeth doesn't mean they aren't there. Teeth actually begin to form in the second trimester of pregnancy. At birth, your baby has twenty (20) primary teeth, some of which are fully developed in the jaw.

Even babies can develop tooth decay if good feeding habits aren't practiced. When sugar from juice or milk remain on a baby's tooth for hours, the sugar can eat away at the enamel. As the new teeth come in, parents can brush them with an infant toothbrush, using water with just a small smear of toothpaste, until about age 2.

The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD) in collaboration with Sesame Street offer the following recommendations for the protection of your child's teeth:

- Even before teeth come in, you can take care of your child's mouth by cleaning gums with a washcloth to help clear away harmful bacteria.
- Parents and caregivers should help or watch over their child's tooth brushing abilities until they are at least eight years old.
- Plaque is a sticky film of germs that forms on teeth and gums after eating. Plaque that is not removed by brushing twice a day can lead to cavities.
- Help your preschooler brush their teeth at least twice a day (after breakfast and before bed) to keep them healthy and strong.
- Children should use a soft toothbrush with small heads that allows them to reach all areas of their mouth. Remember to replace toothbrushes every three to four months and even sooner if the bristles are worn out, or if your child has been sick.
- Help your preschooler brush his or her teeth for about two minutes. While helping with the brushing, try playing some music or singing the ABC song four times to help them keep track of time.
- Teeth love crunchy fruits and vegetables! With your child, try some tooth-friendly foods, such as apples, pears, carrots, or celery. Ask your child what each food sounds like when they take a bite – this helps makes it fun.
- A balanced diet helps your child's teeth and gums to be healthy. A diet high in natural or added sugars may place your child at extra risk for tooth decay
  - A sugary or starchy food with sugar is safer for teeth if it is eaten with a meal, not as a snack. Chewing during a meal helps produce saliva which helps wash away sugar and starch.
  - Sticky foods, like potato chips, raisins and other dried fruit and candy are not easily washed away from your child's teeth by saliva, water or milk, so they have more cavity-causing potential
  - Talk to your dentist about serving foods that protect your child's dental health
- Drinking water helps keep bodies healthy and strong. Water can also help wash food away from teeth if there isn't time to brush after a snack.
- It takes a team to keep teeth healthy. Visit your dental office twice a year and stay in touch with your child's primary-care physician and nurse.

- Talk with your child about the grown-ups who can help your child take care of his or her teeth: the doctor, nurse, dentist, hygienist ... and you!
- If it is hard to visit a dental office because of cost or distance, check online or ask your local health department about mobile dental clinics or low-cost services near you.

**PEDIATRIC DENTISTS:** Consider taking your child to a dentist who specializes in treating children. Pediatric dentists are trained to handle the wide range of issues associated with a child's dental health. They also know when to refer you to a different type of specialist, such as an orthodontist to correct an overbite or an oral surgeon for jaw realignment.

A pediatric dentist's primary goals are prevention (heading off potential problems before they occur) and maintenance (using routine checkups and proper daily care to keep teeth and gums healthy).

**PREVENTING CAVITIES:** The American Dental Association (ADA) recommends that a child's first visit to the dentist take place by the first birthday. At this visit, the dentist will explain proper brushing and flossing techniques (you need to floss once your baby has two teeth that touch) and conduct a modified exam while your baby sits on your lap.

**ORTHODONTIA:** As children grow older, their bite and the straightness of their teeth can become an issue. Orthodontic treatment begins earlier now than it used to, but what once was a symbol of preteen embarrassment – a mouth filled with metal wires and braces – is a relic of the past. Children as young as age seven (7) now sport corrective appliances, and efficient, plastic-based materials have replaced old-fashioned metal.

**CAVITIES GET AROUND CAMPAIGN:** To provide Colorado with a higher level of dental awareness Delta Dental of Colorado Foundation recently launched (2014) a multi-year campaign, called *Cavities Get Around*.

The *Cavities Get Around* campaign informs the community about how to protect children against tooth decay. The new website ([www.CavitiesGetAround.com](http://www.CavitiesGetAround.com)) serves as a resource for members of the community to learn how important baby teeth are and how to care for them properly. The campaign will also engage community leaders on the issue of oral health in Colorado.

## RESOURCES TO CONTACT & ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry revised Policy on Dietary Recommendations for Infants, Children, and Adolescents  
([http://www.aapd.org/media/Policies\\_Guidelines/P\\_DietaryRec.Pdf](http://www.aapd.org/media/Policies_Guidelines/P_DietaryRec.Pdf))
- Sesame Street Healthy Teeth, Healthy Me Tips  
(<http://www.seasamestreet.org/parents/topicsandactivities/toolkits/teeth/tips>)
- American Dental Association Keeping Your Child's Teeth Healthy  
(<http://kidshealth.org/parent/general/teeth/healthy.html>)
- Delta Dental of Colorado Foundation *Cavities Get Around Campaign*  
([www.CavitiesGetAround.com](http://www.CavitiesGetAround.com))



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