

Good dental habits from the start

Oral health for kids: What you need to know



When it comes to building healthy dental habits in kids, it's important to start early and stay consistent – from the first dental visit to a stable at-home hygiene routine.

Infants

Did you know that dental care should start at birth? You can clean your baby's gums with a soft infant toothbrush or cloth and water. Later on, parents should use a tiny smear (grain of rice size) of fluoride toothpaste and a soft, age-appropriate sized toothbrush to brush baby teeth twice daily as soon as they erupt.¹

A child's first dental visit should occur after the primary teeth have started to appear, usually by the first birthday.²

Children

As your child grows, there are a few ways to help prevent tooth decay, including limiting sugary snacks and beverages, and use of fluoride products and dental sealants. Your dentist can guide you on these topics and usage of appropriate products.

Fluoride is available through supplements, toothpastes, mouth rinses, and community water fluoridation.

Dental sealants are a material placed in the grooves of the back teeth that help to "seal" out decay.³ Sealants are generally prescribed for children and adolescents who may be at higher risk for tooth decay.

Adolescents

With adolescents, a big challenge is getting them to maintain proper oral hygiene at home, especially if they have braces. For smartphone-loving teens, download a fun app with a two-minute brush timer and push notifications to brush.

Soda, sports and energy drinks, and carbonated drink consumption increase the risk of tooth decay.⁴ People who drink these beverages should rinse with water afterward to reduce the amount of sugar left in the mouth.

Does your teen like to chew gum? Sugarless gum may help prevent tooth decay when added to a regular home oral care routine of twice daily brushing and daily flossing.⁵



Schedule a check-up today

Regular dental cleanings with your dentist/dental hygienist are recommended to help keep your child's mouth healthy and catch any issues when they're small. Find a general dentist or pediatric dentist at [myCigna.com](https://www.mycigna.com).



Don't worry. There are simple things you can do to help protect your children from cavities.

- › Stop giving your baby a bottle by the time they are 12 months of age.
- › Visit the dentist and practice good oral health habits yourself.
- › Don't put your baby to bed or nap with a bottle containing anything except water.
- › Limit nighttime feedings (breast or bottle) after eruption of a child's first tooth.
- › Encourage drinking from a cup by age one.
- › Offer water, and limit juice by age one.
- › Provide a balanced diet by age one.
- › Brush your child's teeth twice a day as soon as they erupt.
- › Take your child to the dentist by age one and as often as your dentist recommends.



1. American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry. "Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ): Toothpaste: when should we begin using it and how much should we use?" <https://www.aapd.org/resources/parent/faq>. Accessed November 18, 2022.
2. "Clinical Guideline on Periodicity of Examination, Preventive Dental Services, Anticipatory Guidance, and Oral Treatment of Children." American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry Reference Manual 2020–2021. p. 232–241.
3. NIH National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research. "Dental Sealants." <https://www.nidcr.nih.gov/health-info/sealants/more-info>. Page last reviewed September 2022.
4. Healthline. "The 8 Worst Foods for Your Teeth." <https://www.healthline.com/health/dental-and-oral-health/worst-foods-for-your-teeth>. Medically reviewed on May 31, 2022.
5. American Dental Association. "Chewing Gum." <https://www.ada.org/resources/research/science-and-research-institute/oral-health-topics/chewing-gum>. Prepared by: Department of Scientific Information, Evidence Synthesis & Translation Research, ADA Science & Research Institute. Updated: October 6, 2021.

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