

## Flossing



During early eruption, the teeth do not come into contact with adjacent teeth. Therefore, the toothbrush bristles have access to cleaning all of the tooth surfaces. Flossing isn't necessary until teeth come into contact with each other on the front and back surfaces. This occurs at different ages for children. Your pediatric dentist will tell you when it's time to add flossing to your child's oral care routine.

## Early Infant Childhood Decay

Offering a bottle or breastmilk at bedtime may help comfort your child to sleep, but it also allows sugars to pool around the teeth, increasing the risk for tooth decay. When your child feeds actively, swallowing and the flow of saliva clean the teeth. Once the nutritional needs are met and nursing continues, sucking becomes passive. Instead of being swallowed, the liquid clings to the teeth, where its sugar content is converted to acid. The maxillary incisors are usually affected first, with a decay pattern that includes multiple tooth surfaces. White spots on the front teeth near the gum line are a sign of early childhood decay. Almost any liquid, except plain water contains sugar, which can be converted to acid. The following beverages contain sugar (a simple carbohydrate): fruit juices, soda pop formula, cow's milk, rice milk, soy milk, and breast milk. Children who have continuous access to sippy cups filled with these beverages can also develop this serious decay pattern. Replacing these drinks with water will decrease this risk.



THIS INFORMATION IS PROVIDED TO YOU BY

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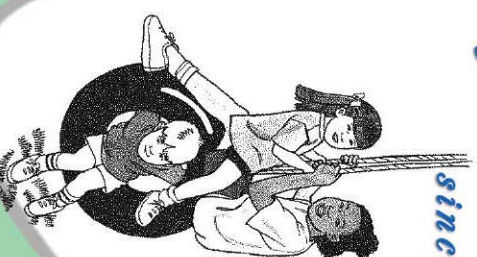
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## Importance of Primary Teeth



Primary teeth serve a number of functions. It is important to keep primary teeth until they are lost naturally. Healthy teeth improve speech, esthetics and the development of your child's self-image. They permit your child to chew properly and thus help maintain good nutrition. Primary teeth also help guide the proper eruption and positioning of the permanent teeth.



## Bacteria + Carbohydrates = Decay

Tooth decay is actually the result of a bacterial infection. It begins when bacteria which normally live in our mouths feed on simple sugars from the foods and beverages we consume. After digesting these sugars, the bacteria produce an acid that breaks down tooth enamel, causing it to lose its hardness. Over time this process can produce a hole in the tooth, a cavity. Plaque is the sticky biofilm of decay-causing bacteria and bacterial byproducts that adheres to tooth enamel. Toothbrushing disturbs this biofilm and breaks the cycle of decay.

## Infant Oral Hygiene



Regular toothbrushing becomes important with the eruption of your child's first tooth.

As soon as the tooth emerges from the gums, it becomes a target for bacteria and, therefore, needs to be cleaned properly. One method of cleaning the first erupting teeth is to drape a gauze pad or washcloth over your finger and wipe the teeth gently. A toothbrush with soft bristles and a small cushioned head can be introduced as more teeth emerge. One may also use a very small (pea-sized) amount of fluoridated toothpaste. Sometimes your child's gums may bleed a bit while brushing. However, continue brushing, angling the toothbrush bristles toward the gums. When the plaque near the gum line is consistently removed, the gums will stop bleeding and return to a firm, pink, and healthy appearance.

Why start brushing so early? First, children infected with decay-causing bacteria early in life are at greater risk for high levels of tooth decay, by four years of age. Second, children with tooth decay in their baby teeth are at greater risk for developing tooth decay in their permanent teeth. Third, getting into the habit of brushing can be easier for a receptive baby than an independent toddler.

## Brushing Techniques

There are several effective ways to go about brushing your child's teeth. Whether your child is lying down, sitting on your lap, or standing in front of you facing away, approaching from behind the head with the toothbrush provides easy access to the tooth surfaces. Your pediatric dentist can quickly show you anyone of the several methods for effective visualization and cleaning of the child's mouth.



## What is Fluoride?

For over 50 years, fluoride has been recognized for its decay-preventing qualities. There are three basic ways to bring the benefits of fluoride to your child: fluoridated community water, application of fluoride to the tooth surfaces with a fluoride-containing toothpaste, and oral fluoride supplements. Supplements may be recommended after a test confirms that a well or community water supply does not contain fluoride. Your pediatric dentist can often provide this water testing for you.

## Injuries to the Teeth and Mouth

Injuries occur frequently. Although your child may not complain of pain, do not ignore bumps and falls. Early observation and treatment of injuries can reduce the danger of more serious problems occurring. If a primary tooth is fractured, displaced or knocked out, contact your pediatric dentist for evaluation immediately.

## Thumb Sucking and Other Oral Habits

Thumb and pacifier sucking are the most common oral habits that affect the shape of the mouth and alignment of the teeth. As a general rule, a sucking habit should end as early as possible after primary tooth eruption. If the habit is allowed to continue, damage to the alignment of the permanent teeth can occur. The tongue can also develop a habitually incorrect posture, adding to the difficulty of correcting the problem orthodontically.

## The Pediatric Dentist

The pediatric dentist specializes in the comprehensive care of children's teeth, establishing trust and confidence in the dentist from an early age. Children will be more likely to maintain this relationship throughout their lives. There are a variety of techniques employed to alleviate fear during dental visits, all of which are part of the pediatric dentist's specialty training.

