
Infant and Children's Oral Health

Infant and Children's Oral Health

Birth to 6 months of age

It is important to care for your child's teeth and dental (oral) health from birth. Practicing healthy habits can prevent or reduce tooth decay (cavities) in infants and children. Always clean your infant's gums after feeding: Cradle your baby with one arm. Wrap a moistened washcloth around the index finger of your free hand. Gently massage the gum tissues. Do not put your baby to bed with a bottle, prop it in their mouth or allow your baby to feed "at will". Infants normally begin teething between four and six months of age. His/her gums may be red and swollen and saliva flow may increase. To ease these symptoms, give your infant a clean teething ring or cold wet washcloth. Cold temperatures are soothing, so you may want to chill the teething ring. Remember, dental decay is an infectious transmissible disease. Avoid testing the temperature of the bottle with your mouth, sharing utensils (e.g. spoons), or cleaning a pacifier or a bottle nipple by putting it in your mouth. These practices can help stop the transmission of bacteria that cause tooth decay (cavities).

6-12 months of age

Between the ages of six to eight months, your baby will get his/her first tooth. It is important to care for his/her teeth right from the start. Practicing healthy habits can prevent or reduce tooth decay (cavities) in infants and children. Continue to clean your infant's gums after feeding. Once a tooth comes in, start to use a child's soft bristled toothbrush, with no toothpaste, in addition to massaging the gum tissues. To relieve the symptoms of teething, give your infant a clean teething ring or cold wet washcloth. Cold temperatures are soothing, so you may want to chill the teething ring. Begin to wean your baby from the bottle as your infant begins to eat more solid foods and drinks from a cup. Gradually, begin to offer a cup for water or juice. By age 12 to 14 months, most children can drink from a cup.

Promote healthy habits now by limiting the frequency and amount of sweetened beverages and foods you give your child. Do not allow your baby to walk around with his/her bottle. Be familiar with the normal appearance of your child's gums and teeth. Regularly, lift your child's lips to check for suspicious small white or brown spots on his/her teeth. If you see these white or brown spots, which may indicate dental decay (cavities), schedule an appointment with your dentist right away. Schedule your child's first dental appointment. Your child should have an

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exam by a dentist before his/her first birthday or within 6 months after the first tooth comes in. If your drinking water is not fluoridated, talk to your pediatrician about infant fluoride supplements. Remember, dental decay is an infectious transmissible disease. Avoid testing the temperature of the bottle with your mouth, sharing utensils (e.g. spoons), or cleaning a pacifier or a bottle nipple by putting it in your mouth. These practices can help stop the transmission of bacteria that cause tooth decay (cavities).

12 to 18 months of age

By the age of one, your child should have an oral examination by a dentist. Continue to brush your child's teeth twice a day with plain water. Regularly, lift your child's lips to check for suspicious small white or brown spots on his/her teeth. If you see these white or brown spots, which may indicate dental decay (cavities), schedule an appointment with your dentist right away. If your child has not seen a dentist for their first dental exam, schedule an appointment. Continue to take steps to avoid passing decay-causing germs to your child.

18 months to age 5

By 30 months of age, all of the primary (first) teeth should have come into the mouth. By age 3, most toddlers should have stopped using the pacifier and/or sucking his/her thumb. At age 2, begin brushing with a pea-sized amount (small smear) of fluoridated toothpaste. Teach your child to spit out the toothpaste. Observe to ensure that your child does not swallow the toothpaste. Begin to teach your child how to brush his/her teeth. Generally, children will need help with brushing until they have the hand coordination to clean their own teeth effectively. Children should be able to brush unsupervised by the age of six or seven.

Continue to regularly lift your child's lip to check for suspicious small white or brown spots on his/her teeth. If you see these white or brown spots, which may indicate dental decay (cavities), schedule an appointment with your dentist right away. Bring your child to his/her dentist for a regular checkup. Talk with your dentist if your child is over age 3 and regularly sucks a pacifier or fingers or a thumb. Fluoride protects teeth from tooth decay (cavities) and helps heal early decay. Fluoride is in the drinking water of many towns and cities. Regular and frequent exposure to low doses of fluoride is the best way to protect against dental decay. When fluoride is added to community drinking water, it provides an effective, inexpensive and safe way of reducing dental decay.

To find out if your public water system is fluoridated, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website, My Water's Fluoride. When there is not optimum fluoride in the water, fluoride drops, fluoride tablets, or a fluoride rinse may be given to your child. Be sure to talk to

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your dentist or pediatrician about fluoride supplements. It's up to you to ensure that your child will grow up with good, strong teeth. Injury Prevention Injuries to the head, face and mouth are common among infants and children. Infants and toddlers will fall when crawling or walking, bump into furniture or a wall when running. Protect your child from facial trauma and injury by safeguarding your surroundings and practicing safety habits. Learn how to prevent oral injuries and handle dental emergencies.

Birth to 6 months of age

When changing your baby or when they are in high places, protect them with one hand Do not use an infant walker at any age Always use a safety seat when traveling in a car. Be sure it is installed and used correctly at all times.

6 – 8 months of age

Protect your baby with one hand when they are in high places and when changing diapers. Do not use an infant walker at any age Always use a safety seat when traveling in a car. Be sure it is installed and used correctly at all times Install gates at the top and bottom of stairs and safety devices on windows. Closely monitor your child when he/she is on the stairs. Keep pet food and dishes out of reach Childproof your house. Use safety locks on cabinets Provide your child's caregivers with emergency phone contact numbers including your dentist's number. Ensure caregivers are familiar with handling oral health emergencies.

Age 4-10

Ensure your child is wearing a safety belt while driving or riding in the car Ensure your child is wearing a helmet when riding a bicycle, skateboard or in-line skates. Ensure your child wears appropriate play and athletic protective gear (i.e., mouth guard, face protector, helmet) when participating in sports or activities that could result in an injury to the mouth. Adolescence Ensure your child is wearing a safety belt while driving or riding in the car. If your adolescent is driving, insist that their passengers also wear safety belts. Follow the speed limit. Ensure your child is wearing a helmet when riding a bicycle, skateboard, in-line skates, motorcycle or an all-terrain vehicle (ATV). Ensure your child wears appropriate play and athletic protective gear, including mouth guards.

Ways to ease hospital anxiety for children

For patients of any age, a trip to the hospital can be uncomfortable. However, for pediatric patients, it can be especially traumatic. In addition to the reason for their visit, which is likely

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stressful on its own, they're introduced to an environment full of unusual sights and sounds. Depending on their age, they may have unpleasant memories of previous hospital visits. Not to mention, television shows and movies don't exactly portray hospitals as a bright and cheerful space. As you've likely experienced, when a pediatric patient becomes anxious, administering treatment can become especially difficult.

The situation can become emotionally stressful for not only the child, but his or her parents and, often, for the nurse and staff providing care.

In order to reduce hospital anxiety in your younger patients, consider the following 7 tips:

- Practice Calmness Anxiety is contagious. It's easy to become frazzled during a busy shift, but, when you become tense and stressed, it's usually evident in your voice and body language. A healthcare provider who shows anxiousness only serves to enhance the nervousness of young patients and their parents. They count on you to remain strong and composed, no matter the situation. Luckily, calmness is also infectious. By breathing evenly and speaking confidently, you can help your patient to relax and feel at ease.

- Talk Through the Experience Many times, pediatric patients are anxious because they don't know what to expect. Will you be giving them a shot? Is it going to hurt? Will they have to stay overnight or be separated from their parents? The best way to assuage their fears is by recognizing and communicating with them. Instead of talking only with the parents, include children in the conversation as much as is appropriate for their age and level of understanding.

- Play Music The power of music as an anti-anxiety agent has been studied for decades. Research proves certain types of music has elicited a wide variety of physical and emotional responses. For example, slow tempos can relax muscles and soothe the mind. By playing soft, relaxing music—either in the exam room or through headphones given to the patient—you can offer fast anxiety relief to a fearful child.

- Employ Distractions. Nurses who have spent a great deal of time on the pediatrics floor know a little distraction goes a long way. Take patients' minds off their concerns by asking questions about their interests. Engage them by asking about school, their favorite TV shows, their pets and their friends. Encourage them to share stories. The more they concentrate on these subjects, the less they'll dwell on their fears.

- Offer a Treat. Few things can help children switch gears faster than the presentation of a reward. Some hospitals offer lollipops or other sweets, but this isn't the only option. Instead of a sugary snack, which could make pediatric patients hyper and restless, provide them the opportunity to choose a small toy from a treasure chest.

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- Be Educational. One of the best ways to change a child's perception of the hospital is to pique her interest. Take time to explain various instruments and machines. Allow her to listen to her own heartbeat through your stethoscope. In addition to feeling pride in her new knowledge, she'll feel more comfortable with her surroundings.

- Make Physical Comfort a Top Priority One of the primary reasons children fear the hospital is because they're afraid they're going to feel pain. Even if the reason for their visit is causing them a greater amount of pain than any discomfort caused by an injection or blood draw, the idea of being stuck with a needle can be alarming.

Applying an instant topical anesthetic will not only help improve patient comfort but knowing they'll feel less pain can help calm your patients' nerves. When it comes to children and hospital anxiety, no one tactic is a surefire solution. The patient's age, prior hospital experience, personality and the reason for their visit, can all factor into how they'll respond to anxiety-reducing tactics. However, by combining a variety of solutions, you can help improve your young patients' hospital experience.

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