

Keep Children Healthy With Proper Oral Care

Tips From Pediatric Dentists Help Minimize Risk Of Tooth Decay

(NAPSA)—Healthy teeth are vital to a child's overall health. Cavities and other dental health issues affect not only children's ability to speak and maintain a healthy self-image, but they can cause general health issues such as heart disease later in life.

Although the oral health of most Americans has improved over recent years, tooth decay in young children is actually increasing. Results from a recent Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report show that between 1988-1994 and 1999-2004, the rate of tooth decay in children ages 2 to 5 years increased by 17 percent.

The good news is that despite being the single most common chronic childhood disease, tooth decay is preventable. The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD) offers important ways parents can promote proper oral health for their children to help minimize their risk of tooth decay.

"With proper preventive care, children of all ages can be cavity-free at their next dental check-up," says Dr. Keith R. Morley, president of the AAPD. "But the key is to start oral care right away, with a visit to the dentist by your child's first birthday."

The earlier a child sees a dentist, the easier it is to detect tooth

To start kids on the path to oral health, the AAPD recommends:

- First dental visit by age 1
- Water only in bottles and sippy cups, except during meals
- Fluoridated water
- Limited between-meal snacking
- Cheese as a tooth-friendly snack

For more information about how to keep children's teeth healthy or to locate a pediatric dentist in your area, visit www.aapd.org.



decay before big problems evolve. Too many parents underestimate the importance of baby teeth, but they are necessary for chewing, speaking and appearance to boost a child's self-esteem.

It is important to be careful how you use bottles and sippy cups. Infants and children who sleep with a bottle full of sugary liquid like milk or juice risk developing early childhood caries or "baby bottle tooth decay."

"Many children get cavities as a result of falling asleep with a bottle," says Dr. Morley. "When a

child sleeps, his or her salivary process slows, allowing sugary liquids to coat the teeth and gums and cause decay."

As your child starts to eat more solid foods, the amount of time teeth are exposed to sugars needs to be minimized. Cooked starches, such as breads, crackers and pasta, can lead to cavities as they frequently take longer to clear the mouth than sugars, meaning the decay risk may last even longer. In fact, a caramel will actually dissolve more quickly from the mouth than a cracker, so make sure kids brush their teeth or rinse with water after a starchy meal to prevent cavities.

When looking for healthful snacks for children, one food parents can turn to is cheese, as certain cheeses can clean the mouth of food debris and act as a buffer to neutralize the acids that attack teeth.

"Dental problems and related conditions lead to 51 million missed school hours per year," says Dr. Morley. "Practicing the right oral care habits early can help kids on the path to overall health and success."

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