

Pointers For Parents

A Quick Brush-Up On Children's Dental Health

(NAPS)—For most parents, happiness is seeing a smile on their child's face—right from that first gummy grin. Instilling good dental hygiene habits early can help protect your child's precious smile.

Your dentist can help. Most dental plans cover children, starting at birth. And since February is National Children's Dental Health Month, now is a great time to brush up on the topic. Here are some hints that can help:

Baby Their Baby Teeth

Even though baby teeth eventually fall out, they still matter. Decay and other problems can set the stage for dental problems in adult teeth.

To help prevent decay in baby teeth, never put baby to bed with a bottle. Milk and juice break down into sugars, which can pool around their teeth and cause cavities.

Even before the first tooth pops up, get in the habit of gently wiping baby's gums with a clean, moist cloth after feedings and before bedtime, to prevent bacteria from growing.

Concerned about pacifiers and thumb-sucking? Both can contribute to an overbite. The Academy of Pediatric Dentistry recommends that children stop all sucking habits by 36 months or younger. But pacifiers put less pressure on the teeth than thumb-sucking, and they're an easier habit to break.

Year 1: First Toothbrush, First Dentist Visit

When that first tooth pops up, it's time for baby's first, soft-bristled toothbrush. Also, per the Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, brush gently with plain water or just a drop of toothpaste with fluoride—no bigger than a rice kernel. Be sure to schedule your child's first dental appointment soon after their first birthday, too. Early visits can help them become comfortable with your dentist and reduce anxiety down the road.

If your child is especially fearful or has special physical or developmental needs, consider a pediatric dentist. They have years of specialized training in child psychology and development.

Age 3 And Up: Make Brushing Fun

By age 3, kids can begin using a pea-sized amount of toothpaste with fluoride. Make brushing and flossing a fun daily experience: once in the morning and once at night. Remember that it's



Getting kids into good dental habits early is a wise idea and easier than many parents realize.

difficult for little hands to use a toothbrush correctly—and at a 45-degree angle. They'll need your help for quite a while.

Try setting a timer for two-minute brushing sessions. You can brush together, have a special brushing song, and treat your kids to a colorful character toothbrush. With a little creativity (and much patience), brushing can be a positive, feel-good experience.

A "Silver Lining" For Cavities

A cavity or tooth decay can result when tooth enamel breaks down. Although most cavities are preventable, tooth decay is the most common childhood disease of children aged 6 to 19.

The good news? Dentists now have a painless way to deal with cavities. "An application of silver diamine fluoride can effectively slow or stop the tooth decay process in its tracks," says Dr. Gregory Theis, Director, Dental Services, Delta Dental of Wisconsin.

Applying the antimicrobial liquid is quick and easy. And, because it can prevent the loss of a tooth, many dental plans cover two applications per year.

Teens' Teeth Need TLC, Too

Teenagers are known for their big appetites and busy schedules. They often grab whatever food comes their way—including sticky sweets that tug on braces, and sodas or sports drinks that can erode enamel.

Do your best to offer healthier meal and snack options at home—and don't let your teen skip dental or orthodontic appointments. If you're weary of reminding your teens to wear their elastics or to stop chomping on ice and sticky sweets, give your dentist or orthodontist a heads up—and let them help reinforce healthy choices at the next appointment.