



A Bright, Healthy Smile

Oral Health **Checklist**
for Parents of Children
Ages 5 to 9





As your child's permanent teeth replace baby teeth, good oral health is as important as ever! You can help make sure your child's smile lasts a lifetime by helping your child learn to take care of his/her teeth.

- As your child grows, there are easy actions you and your child can take every day to help protect teeth and gums.
- Oral health is a key element of your child's overall health. This booklet gives you the basic information you need to make good oral care a family tradition!

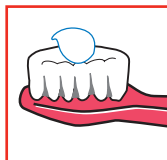


Oral Care at Home

One of the most important facts about cavities is that they are **preventable**. You can make sure your child protects his/her teeth by fighting cavities every day!

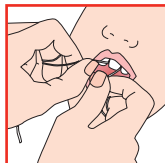
Toothbrushing is Important

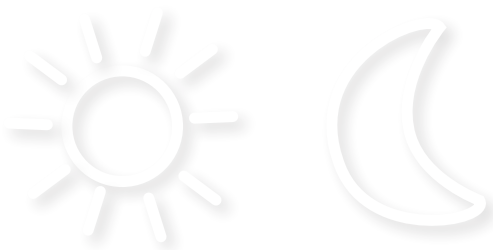
- Make sure your child brushes thoroughly with fluoride toothpaste *at least* twice a day.
 - Brush after eating breakfast and before bedtime.
 - Be sure to brush all teeth – including **new molars** way in the back!
- Use a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste.
- Change toothbrush every 3 months, or when it becomes “shaggy.”



Flossing Your Child's Teeth

- Floss your child's teeth daily.
- Flossing removes the “plaque” from between teeth that brushing may miss.
- When your child reaches age 8, he/she will likely be able to floss his/her own teeth with your supervision.





Be Aware of Your Child's Teeth

During this time, your child's baby teeth will be replaced by permanent teeth.

- It's still important to take care of remaining baby teeth. They are "saving space" for the permanent teeth that are soon to arrive!
- Look inside at your child's teeth and gums monthly; this will help you be familiar with your child's mouth *and* notice changes and potential problems immediately.
- Watch your child's teeth for white spots, especially at the gumline. If you see these early signs of decay, take your child to the dentist as soon as possible. (White spots can be healed.)

Avoid the Spread of Germs

- Never allow your child to share his/her toothbrush.
- Avoid sharing spoons, cups, or anything else that goes in the mouth. Sharing can pass bacteria (germs) that can cause tooth decay.

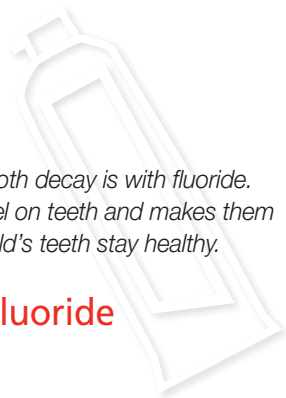


Understanding Fluoride

One of the best ways to protect teeth and help fight tooth decay is with fluoride. Fluoride is a natural element that combines with enamel on teeth and makes them stronger. It is an important part of making sure your child's teeth stay healthy.

Common Sources of Fluoride for Children

- Fluoride Toothpaste
- Fluoride Varnish (may be applied at the dental or physician's office or at school)
- Fluoride Gel (may be applied at the dental office)
- Drinking water, if your community water is fluoridated.
 - Call your local health department or water utility to find out if your water has fluoride.
 - Some bottled water contains fluoride, too. Check the label!
- Fluoride supplements, like drops or tablets. These may be prescribed by the dentist or doctor when your water isn't fluoridated.
- Some foods can contain fluoride, too – especially if they are made from or “reconstituted” with fluoridated water.



The Right Amount of Fluoride

Fluoride is **critical** for preventing tooth decay – but it is possible for a child to get too much fluoride if you live in an area with high natural fluoride content in the water. Ask your dentist about the potential of *fluorosis*, a condition that can cause defects on the tooth enamel, like white marks. More often, fluorosis impacts **permanent teeth**.

Your dental professional can help you make sure that your child gets enough – but not *too* much – fluoride.

Visiting the Dentist

Regular dental checkups are an important aspect of oral health. The dentist is your child's lifelong partner in oral health – and visiting the dentist regularly helps prevent problems.

At the Dental Visit

The dentist and dental hygienist will check gums and teeth and answer any questions. They may:

- Clean and polish the teeth.
- Apply fluoride treatments (put gel or varnish on teeth).
- Take x-rays of teeth or jaw if necessary.
- Floss the teeth.
- Apply dental sealants to your child's permanent molars.
- Provide health education for you and your child.



Dental Visit Checklist

- Talk to your dentist about **fluoride** – especially if your water is not fluoridated. If your child does not drink fluoridated water, the dentist may prescribe fluoride drops.
- Ask about the use of **“antimicrobials”** for your child. These can help prevent tooth decay and may be recommended for some children.
- Also ask about **dental sealants**. They are painless and protect your child's molars.
- The dentist may talk to your child about **tobacco use** and avoiding second-hand smoke.



Food Choices & Snacking

There is bacteria, called “plaque,” that lives in everyone’s mouth – including the mouth of your young child. When food (or any drink other than water) comes in contact with plaque, it makes an acid that attacks teeth and can cause cavities.



It's How Often Your Child Snacks That Counts!

Help prevent decay by limiting the number of times your child eats snacks throughout the day!

- Limit food and drinks with sugar to no more than three times a day. Many children love sweet snacks, but sugar has been shown to cause plaque attacks. It's best to have sweet snacks as part of a main meal, instead of as a snack during the day.
- Encourage healthy food, snack and drink choices. Offer options that are low in sugar to help prevent too much exposure to sweet snacks. Low-fat snacks like raw vegetables, fresh fruits, low-fat cheese, yogurt and milk, or whole-grain crackers, tortillas and bread are good choices.
- Keep your child from sucking on, eating, or drinking acidic foods like lemons, limes, soda, and pickles.

Preventing Injury

Tooth and mouth injuries are very common among children. However, by encouraging simple safety guidelines, you can often prevent them.

Follow These Safety Strategies

- Remind your child to take care on the playground and during school recess. He/she should be alert and not walk in the path of swings, sliding boards, or bats.
- Try to prevent your child from chewing on hard objects like pencils, ice or shelled nuts.
- Always make sure your child is buckled into an appropriately sized **car seat or booster seat**, and make sure it is properly secured. Many local car dealers or police stations do free car seat inspections.
- Make sure your child **wears a helmet** when on a bicycle or scooter.
- As your child becomes involved in sports, make sure he/she wears a **mouth guard**.
- Keep **emergency numbers** handy, including the number for the dentist in case of mouth injury.
- If your child's tooth is chipped or knocked out, contact your dental professional immediately! If it's a permanent tooth, place it in water or milk and take it with you to the dentist.



Be an Oral Care Role Model



Your positive approach can put your child on a path toward a bright, healthy smile that can last a lifetime.

You Are Your Child's Best Teacher!

- Let your child see *you* brush and floss each day.
- Model correct brushing and flossing technique for your child.
- Visit the dentist regularly, and never let your child hear you express a fear of the dentist. Instead, let your child know that the dentist is a "partner" in oral health.
 - Consider a fun family tradition to follow after regular checkups — such as an outing to the park or the movies!
- Whenever you have the chance, talk to your child about how terrific and proud a bright, healthy smile can make him/her feel!

