

Take Care of Your Tot's Teeth

February is Children's Dental Health Month. Has your child seen a dentist? Taking your child to the dentist at an early age is the best way to prevent oral health problems. A trip to the dentist also can educate you on how to properly care for your child's teeth and to identify his or her dental needs. Early visits will help to familiarize your child with the dental office, too, which helps to reduce anxiety and fear, and make visits more stress-free in the future.

Can tooth decay affect infants?

Yes. Tooth decay in infants and young children most often occurs in the upper front teeth. This decay, commonly referred to as "baby bottle tooth decay," is caused by prolonged exposure of a child's teeth to liquids containing sugars. Your dentist can tell you more about what you can do to help prevent the development of this condition.

When should my child first see a dentist?

The ideal time is six months after your child's first (primary) teeth erupt or by the child's first birthday. This time frame is the perfect opportunity for the dentist to carefully examine the development of your child's mouth. Your dentist may even provide or recommend special preventive care to thwart oral health problems.

How can I protect my child's oral health?

Parents should provide their child's oral hygiene care until the child is old



enough to take responsibility for the daily routine of brushing and flossing. A proper regimen of preventive home care is important from the day your child is born. To help prevent tooth decay, talk to your dentist and follow the tips below:

- Clean your infant's gums with a clean, damp cloth after each feeding.
- As soon as the first teeth come in, begin brushing them with a small, soft-bristled toothbrush and water. If you are considering using toothpaste before your child's second birthday, ask your dentist first.
- To avoid teeth misalignment due to sucking, monitor excessive sucking of pacifiers, fingers, and thumbs.
- Never allow your child to fall asleep with a bottle containing milk, formula, fruit juice, or sweetened liquids.
- Avoid filling your child's bottle with liquids like sugar water and soft drinks.

- Encourage children to drink tap or fountain water. If you purchase bottled water, make sure that it is fluoridated. Fluoride makes the entire tooth structure more resistant to decay and promotes remineralization.
- Find out if your public water supply is fluoridated. If it is not, your dentist or your physician may prescribe fluoride supplements.
- To build self-confidence, encourage the child to brush his or her own teeth when he or she is old enough. Always monitor the child's brushing technique and thoroughness to ensure proper technique.
- The best way to teach a child how to brush is to lead by good example. Allowing your child to watch you brush your teeth teaches the importance of good oral hygiene.

Does the AGD offer any resources for my family?

Yes! Check out the Academy of General Dentistry's (AGD) consumer Web site, www.KnowYourTeeth.com—the Internet's go-to resource for all things dental. Areas of the Web site include a dental diary with helpful calendar reminders, useful articles on dental care and oral health for patients of all ages, a "Life of a Tooth" animated timeline that explains how the teeth and mouth change over a lifetime, a dental advisor to whom you can pose questions, information on finding a highly qualified general dentist for your family, and much more!