



Infant's Oral Health

A Check-List for Parents and Caregivers

1. Who is most responsible for the health of a child's teeth?

The parent or caregiver.

- ✓ Children need adults to help them brush and floss away sticky food and germs until they are at least 7 years of age.

2. When should a parent or caregiver begin to clean a child's mouth and teeth?

As early as possible, before the teeth erupt.

- ✓ It is important for adults to begin cleaning their baby's gums with a clean, damp soft cloth every day, before the baby's teeth first appear in the mouth.
- ✓ As soon as the baby's first tooth appears in the mouth, it is important that adults clean and brush their baby's teeth with a clean, damp soft cloth or small soft infant toothbrush after feeding and before bedtime.

3. When do a baby's first teeth begin to erupt (come in)?

Every baby is different: usually the first tooth will come in around six months of age.

- ✓ Allow the baby to chew on a cold, wet washcloth, safe teething ring or a frozen bagel to soothe teething discomfort.

4. What is meant by the term "tooth decay"?

The destruction of tooth enamel by acid producing bacteria

- ✓ Bacteria + Food + Teeth = Tooth decay
- ✓ The most common type of decay found in children under the age of two is called Early Childhood Caries (ECC)
- ✓ **To avoid early childhood caries**, some things you should **never** do are:
 - ✓ Put your baby to bed with a bottle containing any liquid other than water,
 - ✓ Share eating utensils,
 - ✓ Share cups,
 - ✓ Share toothbrushes,
 - ✓ Put baby's hands in your mouth
 - ✓ Put bottle or pacifier in your mouth before giving to baby

5. How early can tooth decay start?

Decay can begin as soon as teeth begin to come into the mouth.

- ✓ Putting your baby to bed with a bottle filled with milk or juice will damage your baby's teeth.
- ✓ A pacifier should never be dipped into honey, syrup, or sugar-sweetened liquid.

6. **What are common factors that put an individual at high risk for dental decay?**
- ✓ Poor dental care and oral hygiene,
 - ✓ Excessive snacks high in carbohydrates,
 - ✓ One eating habit that promotes decay is giving frequent snacks high in sugar.
 - ✓ Sharing eating utensils, drinking from same cup with parent, sibling or caregiver.
7. **Why is frequent snacking a significant risk for dental decay?**
Bacteria produce the acids that decay teeth for 20 minutes each time food is eaten.
8. **What are some foods that provide a healthy diet for your child?**
Well-chopped raw vegetables and fruit, cooked vegetables, thinly sliced cheese, and milk make the best tooth healthy snacks.
9. **When should a child first see a dentist?**
No later than one year of age.
- ✓ You should take your child to the dentist for the first visit by **age one** or six months after the first tooth erupts.
 - ✓ A dental home is a place that provides continuous dental care starting at age one
 - ✓ It is important to establish a dental home by age one.
 - ✓ Regular cleaning, brushing, flossing and dental check-ups every six months starting at age one, will prevent cavities and avoid unnecessary pain for your child.
 - ✓ When you see white spots or stains on your child's teeth; OR if your child has pain or swelling in the mouth, you need to take your child to a dentist.
10. **How often should you check your child's teeth for early childhood caries?**
A baby's teeth should be checked monthly, by lifting the upper lip.
11. **What happens if decay goes too far?**
- ✓ Pain
 - ✓ Expensive dental treatment,
 - ✓ Loss of teeth, shifting of other teeth
 - ✓ Speech may be affected,
 - ✓ May have difficulty learning to pronounce letters
 - ✓ Self-esteem of child; may be embarrassed by the way teeth look or embarrassed that they are missing teeth
12. **What is the safest method to get fluoride in the diet?**
By drinking and using publically fluoridated tap water.
13. **At what age should a baby be weaned from the bottle to a cup?**
*A child should be drinking from **a cup only** by age fourteen months.*
14. **How much toothpaste should you put on a brush for a child over two years old?** *A pearl or pea-size amount.*

Infant Oral Health Prevention Includes:

- ❑ **Start to care for your baby's mouth at birth.**
As your baby's teeth come in, keep cleaning the gums and teeth everyday with a soft cloth or use a soft baby toothbrush to prevent early childhood caries (decay)
- ❑ **Wipe or brush your baby's gums and teeth after all meals or snacks for at least 2 minutes, brushing every surface of every tooth, including the tongue. Help children brush until they are at least 7 years old.**
- ❑ **Always make brushing your baby's teeth the last thing you do before putting your baby to bed.**
- ❑ **Once a month, lift your baby's lip and get a good look at all of the teeth. If you see white or brown spots on your child's teeth contact your dentist or doctor right away.**
- ❑ **Begin to switch your baby from bottle to cup at Age One. Don't let your baby sleep with a bottle.**
- ❑ **Sippy cups can be used at meals but do not let the child carry them around all day or go to bed with one.**
- ❑ **Offering child water to drink between meals.**
- ❑ **Parents visiting the dentist for regular check-ups (every six months) and having any decay treated so they won't spread their dental infection to their child.**
- ❑ **Taking your child for the first dental visit by Age One and establishing a dental home for your child.**

