

Keeping Your Children's Teeth Healthy

February is "National Children's Dental Health Month." To celebrate, the Chicago Dental Society offers tips to parents for taking care of children's teeth—at any age! Read on for advice that will help ensure a lifetime of healthy smiles for you and your child.

- **REMEMBER, A CHILD'S DENTAL CARE BEGINS BEFORE BIRTH.** A child's teeth form between the third and sixth month of pregnancy. An expectant mother must practice good health habits to ensure proper development of her unborn child's teeth. This means consuming plenty of calcium-rich foods such as leafy greens, fortified cereals and dairy or soy products.
- **JUST BECAUSE YOU CAN'T SEE YOUR BABY'S TEETH DOESN'T MEAN THEY AREN'T THERE.** At birth, your baby has 20 primary teeth, some of which are almost completely formed in the jaw. The first four teeth will usually erupt when the baby is between 6 months and 1 year, but that doesn't mean you can't do anything in the meantime. Simply wiping a baby's gums with a clean gauze pad after feeding will remove harmful plaque and bacteria.
- **TAKE YOUR CHILD TO THE DENTIST BY HIS/HER FIRST BIRTHDAY.** A dentist will check your 1-year old for tooth decay, as well as identify fluoride needs and address any potentially dangerous habits such as thumb sucking.
- **DON'T USE TOOTHPASTE FOR CHILDREN UNDER 2.** As soon as the first teeth appear, brush teeth with a little bit of water. After children have reached the age of 2, toothpaste can be introduced in pea-sized amounts.
- **TEACH YOUR CHILDREN THE PROPER BRUSHING TECHNIQUES.** Most children will be able to brush their own teeth by age 6 or 7. Select for them a brush that has soft, rounded bristles and teach them to use only a pea-sized amount of toothpaste. Show them how to use circular brush strokes to reach all surfaces of teeth, and make sure they spit out the toothpaste and rinse with water after brushing to avoid swallowing any toothpaste.
- **DON'T FORGET THE FLOSS!** As soon as any two teeth touch, make sure that you use floss to clean between your child's teeth. This is the only way to avoid decay in places where a toothbrush can't reach.
- **MAKE TRIPS TO THE DENTIST FUN FOR YOUR CHILD.** It is important for your child to have a good attitude toward dental visits. Be positive and remind your child that the dentist is a friendly doctor who is helping to take care of his or her teeth. Set a good example yourself by brushing and flossing twice a day and visiting the dentist regularly.
- **TAKE AN ACTIVE ROLL IN YOUR CHILD'S ORAL HEALTH.** You should always inform the dentist as to the status of your child's health. Tell the dentist if your child is ill, what medications your child may be taking and if your child has any known drug allergies. If you don't understand a dentist's recommendations for the treatment of your child, ask for a more detailed explanation. Ask if there are other treatments available for this problem and, if so, how these other options compare cost wise. Then ask which of these methods would be most effective in treating the problem.

