

Protecting your Baby's Teeth

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- First visit by the first birthday. A child should visit the dentist within six months of the eruption of the first tooth or by age one. Early examination and preventive care will protect your child's smile now and in the future.
- Dental problems can begin early. A big concern is Early Childhood Caries (also known as baby bottle tooth decay or nursing caries). Children risk severe decay from using a bottle during naps or at night or when they nurse continuously from the breast.
- The earlier the dental visit, the better the chance of preventing dental problems. Children with healthy teeth chew food easily, are better able to learn to speak clearly, and smile with confidence. Start children now on a lifetime of good dental habits.
- Encourage children to drink from a cup as they approach their first birthday. Children should not fall asleep with a bottle. At-will nighttime breast-feeding should be avoided after the first primary teeth begin to erupt. Drinking juice from a bottle should be avoided. When juice is offered, it should be in a cup.
- Children should be weaned from the bottle at 12-14 months of age.
- Thumb sucking is perfectly normal for infants; most stop by age 2 and it should be discouraged after age 4. Prolonged thumb sucking can create crowded, crooked teeth or bite problems. Dentists can suggest ways to address a prolonged thumb sucking habit.
- Never dip a pacifier into honey or anything sweet before giving it to a baby.
- Limit frequency of snacking, which can increase a child's risk of developing cavities.
- Parents should ensure that young children use an appropriate size toothbrush with a small brushing surface and only a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste at each brushing. Young children should always be supervised while brushing and taught to spit out rather than swallow toothpaste. Unless advised to do so by a dentist or other health professional, parents should not use fluoride toothpaste for children less than two years of age.
- From six months to age 3, children may have sore gums when teeth erupt. Many children like a clean teething ring, cool spoon, or cold wet washcloth. Some parents prefer a chilled ring; others simply rub the baby's gums with a clean finger.
- Parents and caregivers need to take care of their own teeth so that cavity-causing bacteria are not as easily transmitted to children. Don't clean pacifiers and eating utensils with your own mouth before giving them to children. They can also transmit adults' bacteria to children.