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dental care

Your Child's Dental Health

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New parents often ask, "When should my child first see a dentist?" It is generally recommended that an infant be seen by a dentist by the age of 1 or within 6 months after his or her first tooth comes in.

The idea of such early dental visits is surprising to many parents. However, studies have shown that cavities are increasing in preschool-aged children. To prevent early childhood cavities, it is important for parents to find out their child's risk of developing cavities. The old adage, "An ounce of Prevention is worth a pound of Cure" is well-suited for dentistry.

What happens at the first dental visit?

The first dental visit is usually short and involves very little treatment. This visit gives your child an opportunity to meet the dentist and staff in a comfortable, friendly manner. During the examination, the dentist will check:

- Development (number of teeth)
- Position of teeth
- Presence of decay
- Oral hygiene
- Potential problems with gums, jaw, and oral tissues

When should children get their first dental x-rays?

There is no hard and fast rule for when to start getting dental x-rays. Some children who may be at higher risk for dental problems (for example, those prone to baby bottle tooth decay or those with cleft lip/palate) should have x-rays taken earlier than others. Usually most children will have had x-rays taken by the age of 5 or 6.

Preparing for your Child's Dental Visit

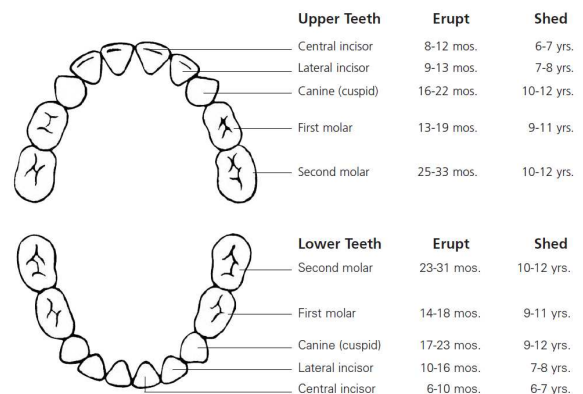
Apart from your child's dental examination, the purpose of the first visit is to learn about your child's oral health and how to best care for your child's unique needs before any problems occur.

The dental office is a new environment for your child and it is normal for a child to fuss during parts or the duration of the dental visit. However, parents may be surprised at how accepting a child can be when the dentist examines them.

It is important that you and your child feel comfortable. Please do not hesitate to bring up any questions or concerns that you may have.

Development

A child's first tooth usually comes into the mouth (called "eruption") at six months of age. From this early age up to the age of twelve, a child's dentition undergoes a number of changes. As adults, we often forget that our first adult tooth erupts at age six; whereas, our last primary tooth is usually shed at age twelve.



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Preventing Dental Caries

Dental caries (“cavities”) is a chronic disease that in children is five times more common than asthma and seven times more common than hay fever. Left untreated, dental caries can to:

- Extensive treatment
- Pain
- Disruption of growth and development
- Life threatening infections

Therefore, risk factors associated with dental caries should be recognized in children. Such risk factors include:

- Diets rich in carbohydrates (“sugar”)
- Poor oral hygiene
- Low fluoride exposure

The Effect of Diet on Dental Caries

A direct link exists between sugar and the development of dental caries. In the mouth, sugar is metabolized by cavity-causing bacteria which produce acid as a by-product. It is this acid which eventually causes dental caries. Therefore, it makes good sense to limit the exposure time of teeth to sugar.

Dietary risk factors include:

- Frequent exposure to sugar
- Prolonged use of sippy or spout cups
- Snacking
- On-demand or prolonged nursing in infants
- Post-bedtime eating or drinking (*this includes milk too!*)
- Prolonged use of sugar-containing oral liquid medications
- Habit of storing food in the mouth by not swallowing

Oral Hygiene

For infants, good oral hygiene should begin prior to the eruption of the first tooth. After feeding, wipe the gums to help accustom the child to oral care. Once the first teeth have erupted, the teeth can be cleaned with a soft toothbrush and water. With increased development, toothpaste can be introduced by adding a light smear to the toothbrush. Good oral hygiene includes:

- Brushing (twice a day)
- Flossing

Fluoride

Fluoride is a safe and effective means of caries prevention. Fluoride incorporates into the enamel thereby making the tooth less susceptible to the acids produced by cavity-causing bacteria. Note: Delay the use of fluoridated toothpaste until your child is able to avoid swallowing toothpaste while brushing.

Sealants

In some individuals, their teeth possess grooves which are too narrow and deep to clean with a toothbrush making them susceptible to decay. Sealants are plastic coatings bonded within these deep grooves as a preventative measure against decay.

Dental Emergencies

With all the bumps and falls associated with childhood and sports, the potential for dental emergencies is an unfortunate reality. In these cases time is of the essence. If a dental emergency occurs, do not hesitate to contact the office.

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