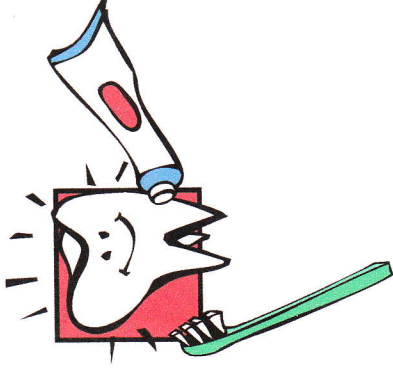


Dental Hygiene: Caring for Your Child's Teeth



Good dental hygiene habits should begin before your child's first tooth comes in. Wiping your baby's gums with a soft damp cloth after feedings will help prevent a buildup of bacteria. When teeth appear, start using a soft children's toothbrush twice a day.

Once your child is pre-school age, start using fluoride toothpaste. A pea size amount of paste is just right – young children tend to swallow most of the toothpaste and too much fluoride toothpaste can cause permanent stains on their teeth.

Cavities are holes that are formed when bacteria (germs) in your mouth use the sugar in food to make acid. This acid eats away at teeth. Cavities are the most common disease in children. Good tooth care can keep cavities from happening in your child.



Your child may be at risk for cavities if he or she:

- ✓ Eats a lot of sugary foods (such as raisins, cookies and candy)
- ✓ Drinks a lot of sweet liquids (such as fruit juice, punch soda and other sweetened drinks)
 - ✓ Was born prematurely or weighed very little at birth
 - ✓ Has ongoing special healthcare needs
 - ✓ Has white spots or brown areas on any teeth
 - ✓ Does not go to the dentist very often



To avoid cavities, have meals and snacks at regular times limiting sweet snacks and drinks between meals. Teeth friendly snacks include fresh fruits and vegetables and cheese and crackers. Never put a baby to bed with a bottle unless it contains plain water or let your child walk around during the day with a bottle. Teach your child to use a cup around his or her first birthday.

It is normal for children to suck their thumb, fingers or a pacifier. Most children give this up on their own by the age of 4, with no harm done to their teeth. If you child continues beyond the age of 4, tell your dentist.

Your dentist can watch for any problem as the teeth develop. You should start taking your child to see the dentist around his or her first birthday to establish comfort as well as the good habit of regular check-ups.

