

# Good dental habits

## Teaching kids to care for their teeth

### Caring for kids teeth at all ages

It's never too soon to start good oral health habits. That's because proper childhood care can lead to a lifetime of happy smiles. Here's a peek at how you can get your child on the road to healthy teeth.

### Baby your baby

You can help your baby avoid oral health problems long before any teeth appear. After every feeding, be sure to gently wipe the baby's gums with a soft, damp washcloth or gauze pad.

Even babies can get cavities! To prevent this, don't use the bottle as a pacifier. Never let milk and juices sit on the baby's delicate teeth and gums longer than a normal feeding. If you need to give your baby a bottle at naptime or bedtime, fill it with plain water.

### Teething toddlers

Teething can be a painful experience — for you and your baby. To help relieve baby's discomfort, try one of these simple remedies.\*

- Rub your child's gums with a clean finger or wet gauze pad
- Let him chew on a cool teething ring
- Apply a dab of over-the-counter teething gel

As your baby's first teeth make their arrival, you can start cleaning them every day with a children's soft-bristle toothbrush.

## For a healthy smile from the earliest age

### Baby's first teeth generally appear at these ages:

- Central incisor (front two upper and bottom teeth): 6 – 12 months
- Lateral incisor (two teeth outside the upper and bottom front): 9 – 16 months
- Canines (pointy teeth in upper jaw): 16 – 23 months
- First molars (upper and bottom back teeth): 13 – 19 months
- Second molars (upper and bottom back teeth): 22 – 33 months

Don't worry if your baby's teeth aren't on time. This schedule is only an average. But by age 3, all 20 of your child's primary teeth (also known as baby teeth) should be present and accounted for.

\*Aetna InteliHealth. *Your Infant's Mouth*. Available at [www.simplestepsdental.com/SS/ihtSS/r.WSIHW000/st.31840/t.32478/pr.3.html#Teething](http://www.simplestepsdental.com/SS/ihtSS/r.WSIHW000/st.31840/t.32478/pr.3.html#Teething). Accessed June 25, 2009.



## The first trip to the dentist

Experts suggest it's time for a child's first visit to the dentist after his first birthday. You can make this new experience less scary by talking to your child about what the dentist will do. To make it more fun, try role-playing with your child as "dentist" and "patient" or read a story together about going to the dentist.

### During this first visit, the dentist will:

- Ask about your child's medical history, eating habits and diet
- Check your child's oral hygiene
- Assess the need for fluoride supplements
- Examine the child's mouth for signs of tooth decay
- Talk about appropriate oral care

The dentist's main concern in children under age three is early childhood caries (ECC). This is when a certain acid-producing bacteria appears in a child's mouth and causes damage. A dentist can show you how to protect your child's teeth at this tender age.

## Brush up on brushing

For infants, use a clean, soft-bristle brush in a gentle, short, back-and-forth motion to brush children's teeth and remove plaque. When children are old enough to rinse and spit, you can start adding a pea-sized squirt of toothpaste on their toothbrush.

For older children, here's how to get a handle on proper technique:

- To clean the outside and inside surfaces of teeth, hold the toothbrush at a 45-degree angle and use short, gentle strokes — starting at the gum line.
- For chewing surfaces, hold the brush flat and scrub back and forth.
- On the inside of front teeth, hold the brush vertically and use gentle up-and-down strokes.
- Don't forget to softly brush the tongue and roof of the mouth, too.
- Daily flossing also removes plaque and food particles between teeth and below the gum line.

Aetna is the brand name used for products and services provided by the Aetna group of subsidiary companies, including Aetna Life Insurance Company and its affiliates (Aetna).

This material contains general health information and is not a substitute for diagnosis or treatment by a physician or other dental care professional.



## Teeth-friendly snacks and foods

It's simple: Healthy eating leads to healthy teeth. Many snacks children eat can be harmful to their teeth, while others can build strong bones and healthy gums. So, help children choose more nutritious snacks. These include: vegetables, plain yogurt, fruits and cheese instead of candy, chips and other sugary snacks.

## Teen topics

Dental sealants provide an extra layer of defense against cavities on the chewing surfaces of back teeth. These sealants are made of plastic and are bonded to the teeth by your dentist. Perfect for teens with a sweet tooth!

Braces and retainers help solve a number of problems, including crooked or crowded teeth, overbites or underbites, and incorrect jaw position. Generally speaking, the best time for braces is when your child is between ages 8 and 14. That's because a child's head and mouth are still growing in these years, and teeth can be straightened more easily.

Teenagers playing sports should wear a properly fitted mouth guard. With more than 200,000 mouth and jaw injuries reported each year, mouth guards prevent cutting and bruising of lips and cheeks — especially for teens wearing braces.



**Most kids lose their first baby tooth around age 6 or 7. Of course, some may lose it a little earlier and others a little later. Timing often depends on when they got their first tooth or finished getting all their baby teeth. The earlier the teeth come in, the earlier they tend to fall out to be replaced by adult teeth.**

We want you to know<sup>®</sup>

