

Tooth and Mouth Care

Tooth decay and gum disease are the two major oral health problems. They are the most common and least treated of childhood diseases. For many children, dental disease interferes with eating, sleeping, speaking, playing, learning and smiling. It is also responsible for children missing millions of school hours each year, especially low-income children and children of color, who have poor access to preventive dental care and are thus more vulnerable.

Keeping your child's teeth healthy

The good news is that oral diseases are almost entirely preventable. Here are some tips for preventing oral disease and infections:

- Floss and brush for two to three minutes, using little or no toothpaste. Remember that until age 8, children need adult help to brush thoroughly.
- Good nutrition, which is good for the body, is also good for the mouth. The most harmful foods are those containing sugar.
- Encourage children to drink plenty of water
- Take your children for regular dental visits after age 3 so you can catch and correct oral/dental problems early.
- Using fluoride reduces cavities by up to 50 percent in children. Toothpaste and drinking water may have fluoride. Additional fluoride (prescribed by a dentist) is recommended for children between 6 months and 16 years of age who live in non-fluoridated areas. Discuss fluoride use with your dentist to make sure children are getting enough but not too much.



- Use of sealants (plastic coatings applied to teeth by a dentist) will help prevent tooth decay by creating a physical barrier between the teeth and plaque and food. Since permanent molars are the most at risk for decay, the six-year and twelve-year molars need sealants.
- Using mouth protectors prevents oral/dental injuries among children involved in recreational activities such as soccer, hockey, football and even bicycling and rollerblading. Stock mouth protectors are available in stores, and a better-fitting variety can be custom fitted by your dentist.
- Prevent baby bottle tooth decay—don't leave your child sleeping with a bottle that contains anything but water. Baby bottle tooth decay occurs when a child is frequently exposed to sugary liquids such as milk, including breast milk, fruit juice and other sweet liquids, and those liquids pool in the mouth behind the teeth, causing serious decay. Help your baby learn to drink from a cup; try to discontinue the use of bottles after 12-14 months.



Dental Insurance Resources

More than 25 percent of California preschool and elementary school children and more than 40 percent of high school students have no dental insurance; even the 40 percent of children who have medical insurance have no dental insurance. The following resources could help cover the expense of children's dental care:

- Medi-Cal: (888)747-1222
- Transitional Medi-Cal: (888) 747-1222
- Healthy Families: (888) 880-5305
- CHDP: (888) 604-4636
- California Kids: (888) 335-8227

In addition, community-sponsored programs have programs as well. Some clinics, dental societies, nonprofit organizations, churches, dental schools and private practitioners have services that provide free or lower-cost care to families in need.

by A. Rahman Zamani, MD, MPH



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For more information, please contact:
Healthline 1-800-333-3212

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