



DOES YOUR FAMILY PRACTICE GOOD ORAL CARE?

Nothing is more important than your child's health—and that includes their oral health. Healthy teeth and gums can last a lifetime when they are taken care of properly. That is why it is so important for parents to help children build good oral health habits at an early age.

This checklist will help you assess your family's current oral care habits. After completing the checklist, you'll receive a Certificate of Completion demonstrating that you've reviewed your family's oral health.

WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT STEPS FOR GOOD ORAL HEALTH?

To help keep their teeth healthy for a lifetime, here are four key practices all children should learn at an early age and continue to practice throughout their lives:

- 1) Brush thoroughly at least twice a day with fluoride toothpaste, especially after eating breakfast and before bedtime.
- 2) Floss daily (Ideally, parents should floss for children younger than age 8).
- 3) Limit the number of times you eat snacks each day.
- 4) Visit the dentist regularly.

WHAT ARE RISK FACTORS FOR TOOTH DECAY IN CHILDREN?

- Failure to brush regularly
- Previous experience with cavities
- Living in an area without water fluoridation, salt fluoridation or milk fluoridation
- Frequent snacking on sugary or starchy foods
- Falling asleep with a bottle or while breast feeding
- Certain medications
- Using a bottle throughout the day
- Having a parent or caregiver with untreated tooth decay

Luckily, one of the most important facts about cavities is that they are preventable— if and your child practice good oral care.



WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO LIMIT SNACKING?

Every time you eat a snack, the plaque in your mouth (the sticky film of bacteria that coats the teeth and gums) reacts with the food to create acids. These acids are powerful enough to dissolve the hard enamel that covers teeth. This is how cavities get started.

Because plaque attacks with every snack, *how often* a child eats snacks during the day affects their risk of getting cavities more than *how much* he or she eats at any one time. That is why it is important for parents to limit the number of times your child snacks each day. While young children need to snack for energy, two to three snacks per day (in addition to well-balanced regular meals) is usually sufficient.

WHAT TYPE OF SNACKS SHOULD BE AVOIDED?

All food and beverages (other than water) cause plaque acid to form. Sugars are particularly harmful. Starchy foods are also a concern as they break down into sugars once in the mouth.

Sticky foods, like raisins, dried fruits, potato chips or toffee cling to and between the teeth longer, increasing the length of time the acid attacks the teeth.

Sucking on foods like lollipops, hard candies, mints or cough drops, or drinking sodas or sweetened juices, increases the length of time sugar is in contact with teeth, and increases the chance for cavities.

WHAT TYPE OF SNACKS ARE BEST FOR ORAL HEALTH?

Good choices for healthy snacks include low-fat foods like raw vegetables, fresh fruits, or whole-grain crackers or bread. Another good option is low-fat cheese, milk or yogurt. If your child does chew gum, try to make it sugar-free.

WHY ARE REGULAR DENTAL VISITS SO IMPORTANT?

Seeing a dental professional regularly can help prevent dental problems before they become serious. The International Association of Pediatric Dentists recommends starting regular dental visits no later than 1 year of age. Do not wait until there are problems with tooth color or your child is in pain. The goal is to *prevent* problems.

During your visit, the dental professional may:

- Clean and polish your child's teeth
- Apply fluoride treatments (gel or varnish)
- Take X-rays of the teeth or jaw if necessary
- Check the level of bacteria in your child's mouth
- Floss your child's teeth (to remove plaque and debris trapped between teeth)
- Ask you questions about your child's oral health, risk factors, and any early signs of disease



WHAT TREATMENTS CAN DENTISTS OFFER TO HELP PREVENT CAVITIES?

In addition to cleaning your teeth and gums and spotting areas of tooth decay, dentists can assess your child's risk for tooth decay and offer treatments designed to *prevent* tooth decay from occurring in the first place. The most common of these are fluoride treatments and dental sealants.

Fluoride is a mineral that occurs naturally in many foods and water. It helps prevent cavities and reverse early tooth decay. Fluoride that is placed onto teeth by a dental professional is called fluoride treatment. It sticks to the enamel surface of teeth, and protects teeth from the plaque acids that attack the enamel.

It takes the dental professional just a minute or two to apply the fluoride varnish or gel. The fluoride dries quickly on its own.

Dental sealants are thin plastic coatings that are applied to the chewing surfaces of the permanent back teeth (molars). They fill in the pits and grooves of these teeth, where food and plaque can get stuck and where it is harder to reach with a toothbrush.

Having sealants put on the teeth does not hurt, and they can last between 5 and 10 years. Sealants work together with fluoride to prevent tooth decay.

IF MY CHILD IS STILL AN INFANT, DO I NEED TO DO ANYTHING ABOUT HIS OR HER TEETH?

Even before your baby has teeth, there are things you can do to help prevent cavities. For instance, you should clean his or her gums (using a soft, infant-sized toothbrush or clean, damp cloth):

- After breast or bottle-feeding
- After giving medicine
- Before bed

WHEN BABY TEETH START TO COME IN, HOW OFTEN SHOULD I BRUSH THEM?

You should brush baby teeth at least twice a day—the same as for your own teeth. The best times for brushing baby teeth are after giving breakfast, after giving medicine, and before bedtime. Use a very small amount of fluoride toothpaste and a soft, infant-sized brush.

Once your baby reaches age two:

- Brush at least twice a day with a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste.
- Right before bedtime is the most important time to brush.
- Make sure your child spits out the toothpaste and does not swallow it.

WHAT KIND OF BRISTLES SHOULD MY CHILD'S TOOTHBRUSH HAVE?

Toothbrushes come with soft, medium or hard bristles. Hard bristles can damage tooth enamel and irritate the gums. Most dental professionals recommend soft bristles for both children and adults.

WHAT IS THE RIGHT WAY TO BRUSH TEETH?

- Place the toothbrush alongside the teeth at a 45-degree angle to the gum line.
- Gently move the brush in a small circular motion, cleaning one tooth at time.
- Brush across the chewing surfaces, making sure the bristles get into the grooves and crevices.
- Brush your child's tongue lightly to remove bacteria and keep breath smelling good.
- Have your child rinse his or her mouth with water.

Most children miss the molars and the tongue sides of the bottom teeth when brushing. Be sure to pay special attention to these areas.



HOW OFTEN SHOULD MY CHILD FLOSS THEIR TEETH?

Daily flossing helps prevent cavities by removing plaque and food particles caught between teeth. Ideally, your child should be able to floss his or her own teeth by the time he or she is 9 years old. To floss younger children's teeth, place them in your lap facing you. The technique is the same, no matter who is doing it.

It should be an important part of your child's dental routine—and yours.

WHAT IS THE RIGHT WAY TO FLOSS?

- Take about 18 inches of dental floss and wrap one end around each of your middle fingers.
- Gently slide the floss between two teeth, using a saw-like motion.
- Once at the gum line, pull both ends of the floss in the same direction to form a C shape against one tooth. Pull the floss tightly and move it up and down against one tooth.
- Pull the floss against the other tooth and repeat the motion.
- Repeat this for all of the teeth.
- Be sure to floss both sides of the teeth farthest back in the mouth.

AS A PARENT, WHAT CAN I DO TO SET A GOOD EXAMPLE FOR MY FAMILY?

The single most important thing to remember is that your child looks to you as a role model. You need to take care of you own teeth in order to set a good example for your family. At a minimum, this means following the 4 key steps to good oral health from the beginning of this checklist:

- 1) Brush thoroughly at least twice a day with fluoride toothpaste, especially after eating breakfast and before bedtime.
- 2) Floss daily.
- 3) Limit the number of time you eat snacks each day.
- 4) Visit the dentist regularly.





ALLIANCE FOR A CAVITY-FREE FUTURE
CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION
ORAL HEALTH FAMILY EVALUATION

Congratulations!

This certificate demonstrates that you have evaluated your family's current oral care routine, and reviewed ways to help prevent dental problems for both your children and yourself.

You are on your way to help your family have a Cavity-Free Future.

Please discuss your evaluation results and any questions you may have with your dental professional.

