



A PARENT'S GUIDE

**Healthy  
Teeth  
for Children**

BIRTH TO SIX YEARS

## Dental Health Tip Cards

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*Six Dental Health Tip Cards are available from your local health region that highlight specific topics of interest regarding your child's dental health. As you collect the cards, store them in the front pocket of this booklet for future reference.*



**Pacifiers: Soothing with Safety**



**Early Childhood Cavities**



**Teething**



**Tips for Brushing Your Child's Teeth**



**Fluoride Toothpaste**



**Dental Sealants**

# Table of Contents

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|   |    |
|---|----|
| Introduction .....                              | 1  |
| Preventive Dental Care .....                    | 3  |
| 1. Cleaning Teeth .....                         | 4  |
| 2. Fluorides .....                              | 8  |
| 3. Snacking Tips .....                          | 10 |
| 4. Dental Visits .....                          | 12 |
| Prevent Dental Injury .....                     | 14 |
| First Aid Tips for Common Dental Injuries ..... | 15 |
| Usual Times for Teeth to Appear .....           | 16 |
| Recording Your Child's Baby Teeth .....         | 17 |
| Recording Your Child's Dental Visits .....      | 18 |

# Introduction

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## **A winning smile . . .**

Keep your child smiling. With your help your child can look forward to a beautiful healthy smile.

Good teeth go hand in hand with good health. They help your child's speech development, self esteem and confidence. That great smile is a reward for eating a proper diet, cleaning teeth daily and visiting a dental health professional regularly.

The sooner your child starts practising these activities, the sooner they become habits. Your child depends on your guidance and participation to succeed.

You can easily provide the right environment for your child to develop the healthy teeth they deserve.



This booklet answers some general questions about your child's dental health. If you want information about a particular topic, refer to the *Dental Health Tip* cards available from your local health region or ask your dental health professional for more information.

## **DENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL**

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*Dental health professionals include dentists, dental hygienists, dental assistants, dental therapists and community dental health program staff through your local health region. Services may be available in your community by one or more of these people.*

► *Read on to find out how to start your child on the path to healthy teeth for life!*

# Preventive dental care

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The best way to help your child develop healthy dental practises is to set a good example. If you have a positive attitude about dental health and you practise regular dental care, so will your child.

**To help your child establish good dental habits, it's important to:**

- Clean your child's teeth.
- Allow your child's teeth to benefit from fluoride.
- Limit snacks high in sugar.
- Take your child to visit a dental health professional regularly.

# 1 CLEANING TEETH

Clean your child's teeth at least once a day.

## **Why clean teeth?** *To remove plaque*

Your child needs help to completely remove the plaque from his or her teeth.

Plaque is an invisible sticky buildup of bacteria that forms everyday on the surfaces of the teeth. It can also form along the gum line of the tooth and irritate the gums. If left on the teeth, plaque can cause cavities. A cavity is the breakdown of the enamel (the protective outer surface) of the tooth.

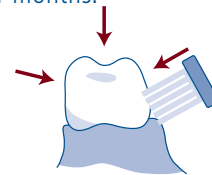
## **How do you clean teeth?** *By brushing and flossing*

Brushing and flossing are the easiest and most common ways to remove plaque. However, young children don't have the co-ordination needed to brush or floss well. At first, you will have to clean your child's teeth. As your child watches, he or she learns to copy your cleaning actions. Soon your child will be able to do some of the cleaning without help. Help your child brush until he or she is eight years of age.

At about eight years of age most children can do a good job of cleaning their teeth on their own. Continue to help and encourage your child to clean his or her teeth daily. Encouraging your child to practise these new skills will support a healthy attitude to this routine.

A child should use a smaller brush than an adult. The brush should be soft with round-tipped bristles. When brush bristles become bent or frayed, replace the brush. A brush usually lasts for three or four months.

Dental health professionals suggest several methods of brushing teeth.



*Each tooth has three surfaces that need to be cleaned.*

### **This method works well:**

1. Hold the toothbrush against the teeth, with bristles at a 45 degree angle to the gumline.
2. Move the brush in circles with a gentle vibrating motion. Clean every surface of the tooth.
3. For the inside of the front teeth, tilt the brush and use small vibrating strokes or small circles with the tip of the brush.





You can't reach all parts of the teeth by brushing. To remove plaque from between the teeth and under the gum line, use dental floss. Ask your dental health professional when to begin flossing your child's teeth.

**Here is how to hold and use floss:**

1. Break off a piece of dental floss about 45 centimetres (18 inches) long.
2. Wind most of the floss around the middle finger of one hand. Wind the rest around the same finger of the other hand.
3. Hold the floss tightly between the fingers and slowly work it between the teeth and down to the gumline. Use a gentle back and forth motion.
4. When the floss is at the gumline, curve it around the tooth, and slide it into the space between the tooth and the gum. Then move the floss up and down against the side of the tooth.



5. Repeat this process on each tooth, using a clean section of the floss each time.
6. Remember to floss the back of the last tooth on each side, top and bottom.



*For children, it may be easier to use a loop of floss formed by tying the two ends together*

### **When do you clean teeth? *Every day***

Ideally, the teeth should be cleaned after each meal, after sugary snacks, and before bed. At the very least, clean your child's mouth at least once a day. Removing the plaque will keep teeth and gums healthy. Develop a good routine for cleaning your child's teeth and your child will have healthy and strong teeth for life.

# 2 FLUORIDES

**Allow your child's teeth to benefit from fluoride.**

Fluoride makes tooth enamel stronger and less likely to decay. It is a naturally occurring mineral found in many foods and some water sources. It may also be added to local water supplies.

The easiest and least expensive way to prevent tooth decay is to make sure your child drinks water containing fluoride. Half of all children, who from birth drink water containing fluoride, remain cavity-free into their teens.

Find out whether the water in your community is fluoridated. If it isn't, you can find other ways to give your child the amount of fluoride necessary to protect the teeth.

### **For alternative sources of fluoride you can:**

- Brush with a fluoride toothpaste. Parents must supervise the use of toothpaste so the child learns to spit out the excess. Ask your dental health professional if and when your child should use fluoride toothpaste.
- Have topical fluoride applied to your child's teeth. These applications are available from your dental health professional.
- Ask a dental health professional about a fluoride rinse. Children over six years of age and at risk for cavities may benefit from a fluoride rinse.

If you have any questions about fluoride, contact your local health region office or dental office for information.

# 3 SNACKING TIPS

## Limit snacks high in sugar.

A balanced diet is important for your child's normal growth and development. In general, a diet that provides good nutrition is also good for teeth. Follow *Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating* to make sure your child is getting the necessary nutrients for a healthy body and healthy teeth. A copy of the guide is available through your local health region.

Children usually need to eat more often than adults. Frequent snacking helps children take in enough food to fuel their daily activities.

To keep your child's teeth healthy, limit the amount of snack foods high in sugar and how often these foods are eaten.

### Here are some tips for snack foods that will not hurt teeth:

- Choose snacks from the four food groups listed in *Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating*. **Caution: some foods are a choking risk for children under four.**
- Avoid snacks high in sugar and those that tend to stick to the teeth. If serving sweets, provide them with meals, when the mouth produces enough saliva to help reduce the effects of sugar.
- Offer a high-protein food such as cheese, which provides some protection from cavities.
- Offer your child water when he or she is thirsty. Fruit juices or other sweetened drinks given often throughout the day in a bottle or sippy cup will increase your child's risk for cavities.
- Medicine often contains sugar. Ask your doctor to prescribe medicine without sugar if it's available.

# 4 DENTAL VISITS

**Visit a dental health professional regularly.**

Visiting a dental health professional regularly is just as important for the health of your child's teeth as healthy eating habits and cleaning teeth daily.

**It is recommended that you:**

- Start early. A dental health professional can look at your child's teeth when your child is six to 12 months of age.
- Be sure your child has a FULL checkup from a dentist by two to three years of age.
- Choose a dental office that welcomes children and provides them with a positive experience.
- Teach your child that visiting the dentist is healthy, interesting and pleasant. Remember that your child will notice and be influenced by your attitude to visiting the dentist.

### Three reasons to take your child for a dental checkup:

- You will find out if the cleaning you do at home is working.
- The dentist can find and fix problems early.
- You will have an opportunity to ask questions about dental health.

The dental health professional will have information on preventive treatments such as sealants and topical fluorides and will suggest when to bring your child in for another visit (For information on sealants, refer to the *Dental Health Tip* card available from your local health region).

### **PUBLIC HEALTH DENTAL PROGRAMS**

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*Regional health authorities have dental health professionals on staff who provide dental health information. Some may also offer dental health programs that provide services such as cleaning and fluoride treatments for children.*

*Call your local health region office for more information. You will find the phone number listed in your local phone book.*



# PREVENT DENTAL INJURY

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**Children are active and sometimes get injured. To protect your child's teeth from injuries:**

- Use approved infant car seats and seat belts at all times.
- Use the restraints provided in strollers and shopping carts.
- Childproof your home when your child is learning to walk. For example, make sure your child does not have access to stairs.
- Teach your child to avoid pushing and shoving when near water fountains or in the playground.
- Provide your child with a mouthguard when playing contact sports such as hockey, baseball, football, and soccer. Mouthguards protect teeth from severe injury and also help absorb the force of a blow to the head, jaw, or neck. Your dental health professional can recommend the right mouthguard.

# FIRST AID TIPS FOR COMMON DENTAL INJURIES

**Contact a dentist immediately if your child's teeth have been knocked out, broken or chipped. Quick action is essential to treat injured teeth effectively.**

## **Toothache**

- Rinse the mouth with warm water.
- Apply a cold compress if there is swelling.
- Take the child to a dentist immediately.
- Do not place aspirin on the tooth or gum.

## **Bleeding and Swelling**

- Fold and pack a clean gauze pad or cloth over the bleeding area and apply gentle pressure.
- Apply a cold compress to the injury for 10 minutes to reduce swelling.

- Take the child to a hospital emergency room if bleeding does not stop.

## **Broken Tooth**

- Rinse dirt from the mouth with warm water, if possible.
- Find and save any pieces of the broken tooth.
- Take the child to a dentist immediately.

## **Knocked-Out Permanent Tooth**

- Pick up the tooth by the crown (tip) and gently rinse it with cold water or milk.

- Gently try to place the tooth back in its socket until you can get to a dentist. If the tooth can not be replaced, place the tooth in a container of cold water or cold milk.
- Take the child and the tooth to a dentist immediately.

## **Knocked-Out Baby Tooth**

- Take the child and the tooth to a dentist immediately. The tooth will not be put back in. Only permanent teeth can be replanted.

## **Lost Cap or Filling**

- Find the cap.
- Tell the child not to chew on that side of his or her mouth.
- Book an appointment with the dentist as soon as possible to have the cap put back on or the filling replaced.

# USUAL TIMES FOR PRIMARY OR BABY TEETH TO APPEAR



*By about three years of age, all 20 primary or baby teeth will have appeared.*



*Children can start losing their primary or baby teeth at six years of age and continue to lose them until 12 years of age.*

Don't worry if your child's teeth appear at different times or in a different order.  
Talk to your dental health professional if you have questions.

# RECORDING YOUR CHILD'S BABY TEETH

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

You may want to use the space provided to record when your child's teeth appear.

|                    |                 |                 |                    |
|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| DAY / MONTH / YEAR | central incisor | central incisor | DAY / MONTH / YEAR |
| DAY / MONTH / YEAR | lateral incisor | lateral incisor | DAY / MONTH / YEAR |
| DAY / MONTH / YEAR | canine (cuspid) | canine (cuspid) | DAY / MONTH / YEAR |
| DAY / MONTH / YEAR | first molar     | first molar     | DAY / MONTH / YEAR |
| DAY / MONTH / YEAR | second molar    | second molar    | DAY / MONTH / YEAR |
| DAY / MONTH / YEAR | second molar    | second molar    | DAY / MONTH / YEAR |
| DAY / MONTH / YEAR | first molar     | first molar     | DAY / MONTH / YEAR |
| DAY / MONTH / YEAR | canine (cuspid) | canine (cuspid) | DAY / MONTH / YEAR |
| DAY / MONTH / YEAR | lateral incisor | lateral incisor | DAY / MONTH / YEAR |
| DAY / MONTH / YEAR | central incisor | central incisor | DAY / MONTH / YEAR |

# RECORDING YOUR CHILD'S DENTAL VISITS

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

First Dental Health Visit: \_\_\_\_\_

*(Age one is a good time to start)*

| Date | Reason for Visit |
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[www.health.gov.ab.ca](http://www.health.gov.ab.ca)



## Pacifiers: Soothing with Safety



When you give a child a pacifier, remember the following DOs and DON'Ts:



### Do

- ◆ Use a one-piece soother with a nipple soft enough to flatten out against the roof of your baby's mouth. A soother that is too hard may cause your baby's jaw to form poorly.
- ◆ Check the pacifier often if using a two-piece soother. Tug on the nipple to make sure it is firmly attached to the base. Babies can suffocate or choke on a nipple that has broken off.
- ◆ Replace pacifiers every two to three months, even if you can't see any wear and tear.
- ◆ Throw away pacifiers immediately when nipples change colour, or become sticky, cracked, or torn.



### Don't

- ◆ Tie a cord holding a pacifier around your baby's neck.
- ◆ Coat the pacifier with honey, syrup, or other sweet substances. This can cause cavities. Honey has also been associated with a form of food poisoning. Honey should not be fed to children under 12 months of age.
- ◆ Clean your baby's pacifier by putting it in your mouth. You run the risk of transmitting germs to your child that could lead to cavities or illness.

## Thumb or Finger Sucking: Rules of Thumb for Parents

- ◆ Sucking is natural for babies and common for toddlers.
- ◆ Most children stop sucking on their own by about two or three years of age.
- ◆ It is best that your child stops sucking his or her thumb before permanent teeth come in, at about age five. Sucking beyond this age may affect the growth of the jaw and teeth.

### Help your child break a sucking habit:

- ◆ Reward your child for not sucking
- ◆ Help your child track their progress by using calendars or stickers
- ◆ Children need encouragement, love, and gentle reminders to help stop the habit.
- ◆ If you are concerned about your child sucking his or her thumb or soother, discuss the habit with your dental health professional.



## Teething

Children usually begin teething at about six months and finish by about three years of age. Each child, however, will have his or her own teething schedule.

Some babies seem to have no problems while teething. Other babies may experience restlessness, irritability, drooling, diaper rash, or rosy cheeks. Teething does not cause illness. High fever and diarrhea are not teething symptoms. Check with a doctor if your child has these symptoms.



### Do

- ◆ Provide your baby with a clean, cold teething ring.
- ◆ Massage your baby's gums with a clean cloth.
- ◆ Give your baby lots of love.
- ◆ Be patient.



## Don't

- ◆ Use ointments that numb: they may cause choking.
- ◆ Give bagels, toast, or raw vegetables: they may cause choking in young children who may not chew very well.
- ◆ Give teething biscuits that are high in sugar and stick to the teeth: they may cause cavities.
- ◆ Use fluid-filled teething rings: they may leak.

## Fluoride Toothpaste

Until your child is six years of age, use less than a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste.



\* Age 1-2 (slight smear)

Some children are at high risk for cavities and may benefit from using fluoride toothpaste when they are under three. Please consult with your dental health professional.



\* Age three-5 (1/2 of pea-size)



\* Age 6+ (pea-size amount)

### Benefits:

- ◆ Fluoride toothpaste helps stop cavities.
- ◆ Cavity-free children are less likely to develop cavities as they grow older.

### Risks:

- ◆ Children under four swallow 40% or more of the toothpaste they use.
- ◆ Swallowing too much fluoride toothpaste may cause the adult front teeth to have white marks (or discoloration).



## Do

- ◆ Always supervise the amount of toothpaste used.
- ◆ Teach your child to spit after brushing.
- ◆ Help your child brush until he or she is eight years of age. Children under eight like to brush on their own, but an adult should do the brushing at bedtime.
- ◆ Brush thoroughly at least once a day: along the gums - where teeth and gums meet the chewing surfaces of the teeth.
- ◆ Use a fluoride toothpaste recognized by the Canadian Dental Association.



## Don't

- ◆ Use more than the amount of fluoride toothpaste recommended for your child's age.
- ◆ Assume your local water provides enough fluoride - ask your dentist if and when your child should use fluoride toothpaste.
- ◆ Let your child swallow fluoride toothpaste.

## Early Childhood Cavities

Some babies get cavities as early as 12 months. Protect your baby's teeth by following these tips:



### Do

- ◆ Clean teeth and gums daily.
- ◆ "Lift the Lip" once a month to look at the teeth. (See the back of this card for instructions.)
- ◆ Wean your baby from the bottle by 12 to 18 months.
- ◆ Introduce liquids by cup at six months of age.
- ◆ Be sure your child has a FULL checkup from a dentist by two to three years of age.
- ◆ Ask your dental health professional about using fluoride toothpaste.
- ◆ Keep your own mouth healthy to prevent spreading cavity-causing germs to your baby.



### Don't

- ◆ Give anything other than water in a bottle or sippy cup at sleep times.
- ◆ Use the bottle, breast, or sippy cup as a pacifier.
- ◆ Give frequent sweet, sticky snacks and sugary drinks, and juices between meals.

A dental health professional can look at your child's teeth when your child is six to 12 months of age.

*...continued on back* ▶



## “Lift the Lip” to check baby’s teeth

Parents should check their baby’s teeth once a month to look for the first signs of tooth decay.



**Stage 1**  
Healthy teeth



**Stage 2**  
Whitish lines along the gum line could mean the beginning of tooth decay



**Stage 3**  
Brown areas or decay spots along the gum line

\* Adapted from Calgary Health Region copyright materials

# Tips for Brushing Your Child's Teeth



When you brush your child's teeth, establish a routine. Remember the following DOs and DON'Ts:



## Do

- ◆ Brush your child's teeth thoroughly at least once a day. Ideally, the teeth should be cleaned after each meal, after sugary snacks, and before bed.
- ◆ Brush your child's teeth at the same time everyday.
- ◆ Use the same brushing pattern each time. If you start on the upper right and finish on the lower left, always follow that pattern.
- ◆ Take short and frequent breaks to allow your child to spit and swallow.
- ◆ Watch where you are brushing to avoid injuring your child's mouth.



## Don't

- ◆ Give up!
- ◆ Brush your child's teeth if he or she is tired or hungry.
- ◆ Use threats to make your child brush his or her teeth.
- ◆ Treat brushing teeth like a chore.

## Techniques for Brushing Your Child's Teeth

- ◆ Find a position that works best for you and your child. You could brush your child's teeth while **sitting on a chair, bed or on the side of a bathtub.**
- ◆ Position yourself behind or to the side of your child rather than in front.
- ◆ Cradle your child's head in your lap, hand, or arm.



- ◆ You may find it comfortable to have your child lie on your lap while:

**Sitting on the floor**



**Sitting on the couch**





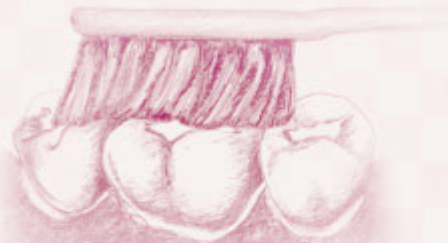
## Dental Sealants

Sealants are an effective way to help protect teeth from cavities.



Sealants are thin plastic coatings painted on the chewing surfaces of healthy back teeth (molars).

The chewing surfaces of the back teeth are rough and uneven, and have small pits and grooves. They are difficult to clean with a toothbrush.





Sealants help to keep out the germs and food that cause cavities. Permanent molars can be sealed as soon as they come in (between the ages of five and seven, and 11 and 14).

Sealants protect part of the tooth. Good dental habits are still important for a healthy mouth and teeth.

If you have any questions about sealants, call your dentist or contact the dental health professional in your local health region.