



# A Bright, Healthy Smile

Oral Health **Checklist**  
for Parents of Children  
**Ages 3 to 5**





Good oral health is as important for baby teeth as it is for permanent teeth! By helping your child learn to take care of his/her teeth now, you can help make sure your child has a healthy smile that lasts a lifetime.

- As your child grows, there are easy actions you can take at home every day to help protect your child's teeth and gums.
- Oral health is a key element of your child's overall health. Read on for need-to-know information to help keep your child's teeth safe and healthy for years to come!



## Be a Role Model

As a parent, YOU are your child's best teacher! Your positive approach can put your child on a path toward a bright smile for a lifetime.



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# Oral Care at Home

One of the most important facts about cavities is that they are **preventable**. You can protect your child's teeth and fight cavities every day!

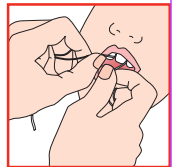
## Toothbrushing is Important

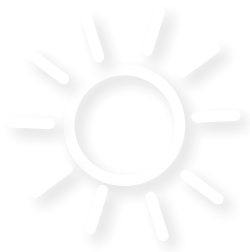
- Brush your child's teeth thoroughly with fluoride toothpaste *at least* twice a day.
  - After eating breakfast
  - Before bedtime
  - After taking sweet liquid medicines, as many contain sugar
- Use a pea-sized amount of toothpaste, and make sure that your child spits it out (and does not swallow it).
- Change your child's toothbrush every 3 months, or when it becomes "shaggy."



## Flossing Your Child's Teeth

- It's important to floss your child's teeth daily once the baby teeth are touching each other.
- Flossing removes the "plaque" from between teeth that brushing may miss.





## Be Aware of Your Child's Baby Teeth

- ❑ Look inside at your child's teeth and gums monthly; this will help you notice changes and potential problems immediately.
- ❑ Watch your child's teeth for white spots, especially at the gumline. If you see these early signs of decay, take your child to the dentist as soon as possible. (White spots can be healed.)
- ❑ Your child's first permanent teeth will be the 6-year-molars, way in the back. Be sure to brush them with fluoride toothpaste once they come in!

## Avoid the Spread of Germs

- ❑ Never allow your child to share his/her toothbrush.
- ❑ Avoid sharing spoons, cups, or anything that has been in your mouth with your child. Sharing can pass bacteria (germs) that can cause tooth decay.



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Let your child see you brush and floss each day. Model correct brushing technique!

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# Understanding Fluoride

*The best way to protect teeth and help fight tooth decay is to use fluoride. Fluoride is a natural element that combines with enamel on teeth and makes them stronger. It is important for keeping teeth healthy!*



## Common Sources of Fluoride for Children

- Fluoride Toothpaste
- Fluoride Varnish (may be applied at the dental or physician's office or at school)
- Fluoride Gel (may be applied at the dental office)
- Drinking water, if your community water is fluoridated.
  - Call your local health department or water utility to find out if your water has fluoride.
  - Some bottled water contains fluoride, too. Check the label!
- Fluoride supplements, like drops or tablets. These may be prescribed by the dentist or doctor when your water isn't fluoridated.
- Some foods can contain fluoride, too – especially if they are made from or “reconstituted” with fluoridated water.



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Point out to your child that grown-ups use fluoride toothpaste, too!

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## The Right Amount of Fluoride

Fluoride is **critical** for preventing tooth decay – but it is possible for a child to get too much fluoride if you live in an area with high natural fluoride content in the water. Ask your dentist about the potential of *fluorosis*, a condition that can cause defects on the tooth enamel, like white marks. More often, fluorosis impacts **permanent teeth**.

Your dental professional can help you make sure that your child gets enough – but not too much – fluoride.

# Visiting the Dentist

*Regular dental checkups are a critical part of oral health. The dentist is your child's lifelong partner in oral health. Do not wait until your child is in pain! Instead, visit the dentist regularly to prevent problems.*

## At the Dental Visit

The dentist and dental hygienist will check your child's gums and teeth and answer any questions. They may:

- Clean and polish the teeth.
- Apply fluoride treatments (put gel or varnish on teeth).
- Take x-rays of teeth or jaw if necessary.
- Floss the teeth once your child's baby teeth are touching each other.
- Provide health education for you and your child.

## Dental Visit Checklist

- Talk to your dentist about **fluoride** – especially if your water is not fluoridated. If your child does not drink fluoridated water, the dentist may prescribe fluoride drops.
- Ask about the use of **“antimicrobials”** for your child. These can help prevent tooth decay and may be recommended for some children.
- If your child sucks his/her thumb, ask about strategies to wean your child of this habit.
- Explore dental sealants for your child's 6-year-molars once they come in.



Be sure that *you* visit the dentist regularly, too, and *never* let your child hear you express a fear of the dentist. Instead, let your child know that the dentist is a “partner” in oral health. Consider a fun family tradition to follow after regular checkups — such as an outing to the park or the movies!

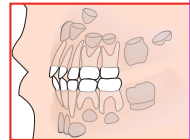
# All About Baby Teeth

*By the time they are in preschool, most children will have 20 baby (primary) teeth — ten teeth on the top, and ten on the bottom. Monitor the care of your child's baby teeth to set your child on the path of good oral health for a lifetime!*

## Why Baby Teeth Are Important

Even though baby teeth will be replaced by permanent teeth, they are a very important part of your child's healthy development. Baby teeth:

- Save space** for permanent teeth, helping them grow in healthy and straight, allowing them to move directly into the space being saved by the primary teeth!
- Help children **form sounds and words**. If a child loses baby teeth prematurely to dental disease or trauma, speech could be affected.
- Round out the shape** of the face. This helps your child smile and promotes positive **self-esteem**.



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Talk to your child about how terrific and proud a bright, healthy smile can make a person feel!

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## About Early Childhood Cavities

There is a dental disease called Early Childhood Caries (Cavities) that can affect young children. It is caused when sugary liquid surrounds the teeth too often.

- Early Childhood Caries can lead to pain and severe cavities in a child's baby teeth. However, the good news is that these cavities are **preventable**.
- Don't let your child drink sugary liquids or eat sweets continuously throughout the day. Instead, encourage your child to drink plain water and limit the number of times he/she eats snacks.

# Food Choices & Snacking

*There is bacteria, called “plaque,” that lives in everyone’s mouth – including the mouth of your young child. When food (or any drink other than water) comes in contact with plaque, it makes an acid that attacks teeth and can cause cavities.*

## It's How Often Your Child Snacks That Counts

Help prevent decay by limiting the number of times your child eats snacks throughout the day!

- Limit food and drinks with sugar to no more than three times a day. Many children love sweet snacks, but sugar has been shown to cause plaque attacks. It's best to have sweet snacks as part of a main meal, instead of as a snack during the day.
- Encourage healthy food, snack and drink choices. Offer options that are low in sugar to help prevent too much exposure to sweet snacks.
- Low-fat snacks like raw vegetables, fresh fruits, low-fat cheese, yogurt and milk, or whole-grain crackers, tortillas or bread are good choices.
- Prevent your child from sucking on, eating or drinking acidic foods like lemons, limes, soda, and pickles.



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Limit the number of times you snack, and join your child in choosing healthy snack options!

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# Preventing Injury

Tooth and mouth injuries are very common among children. However, by taking care and following simple safety guidelines at home, you can often prevent them.



## Follow These Safety Strategies

- ❑ Teach your child to be **alert on the playground** and never walk in the path of swings, sliding boards or bats.
- ❑ Always make sure you child is **buckled into a secure car seat**. Many local car dealers or police stations do free car seat inspections.
- ❑ Try to prevent your child from chewing on **hard objects**, like pencils, ice or shelled nuts.
- ❑ Whether on a tricycle or bicycle (or on the back of your), make sure your child **wears a helmet**.
- ❑ **Lock away cleaning products** and other potentially harmful materials. If swallowed, these can burn the lining of the mouth and cause serious injury.
- ❑ Keep **emergency numbers** handy, including the number for the dentist in case of mouth injury.
- ❑ If your child's tooth is chipped or knocked out, contact your dental professional immediately! If it's a permanent tooth, place it in water or milk and take it with you to the dentist. Never try to put a baby tooth back in the socket!



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Let your child see *you* wearing a bike helmet, too!

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