



Oral Health Tips - For All Ages

Avoid oral health problems such as tooth decay long before any teeth appear in your infant

It's never too soon to start your child on good oral healthcare habits. Good oral healthcare can lead to healthy teeth, gums, tongue, and a lifetime of happy smiles. Some things to think about:

- “Baby” teeth are important for many reasons. They help your child to speak clearly and be able to chew their food.
- Baby teeth can develop cavities and other problems just like adult teeth
- The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry that every child needs to see a dental provider by the appearance of first tooth or latest by the age of 1
- After every feeding, be sure to gently wipe the baby's gums with a soft, damp washcloth or gauze pad
- Don't use the bottle as a pacifier
 - You never want to let milk and juices sit on your baby's teeth and gums longer than a

normal feeding. This can lead to “baby bottle tooth decay”.

- Naptime or bedtime bottles should be filled with plain water

The first trip to the dentist

Your child should see the dentist by the appearance of their first tooth (usually six months of age) or by their first birthday. This first trip to the dentist could be scary for your child. Try some of these tips to help make the dentist not so scary:

- Schedule a pre-appointment meeting with your child's dentist
- Schedule the appointment in the morning after your child has had a good night's sleep
- Avoid using negative words like “ouch” when describing going to the dentist
- Use terms your child can understand. Explain to your child that cavities are holes in their teeth and that the dentist is going to check their mouth to make sure they don't have any.

- Try role-playing with your child as “dentist” and “patient,” or read a story together about going to the dentist

Once you are at the visit, the dentist will:

- Ask about your child’s medical history, eating habits and diet
- Ask about your child’s brushing/cleaning habits
- Look in your child’s mouth for signs of injury or tooth decay (cavities)
 - This is especially important for children under the age of 3
- Clean your child’s teeth and provide tips for daily care
 - Examples: managing teething , thumb sucking, or pacifier use

Oral health in children and adolescents

- For children younger than 3 years, begin brushing their teeth as soon as they begin to come into the mouth by using fluoride toothpaste in an amount no more than a smear or the size of a grain of rice
 - When your child has two teeth that touch, you should begin cleaning between their teeth daily
- For children between the ages of three to six, brush your child’s teeth twice a day (or as told by your dentist) with a child-size toothbrush and a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste
 - Be sure your child is old enough to rinse their mouth with water and spit as they should not swallow toothpaste
- Your child’s dentist or primary care doctor may recommend fluoride varnish or fluoride tablets as an additional oral health disease preventive treatment
- For your teenage children encourage brushing twice a day with toothpaste, flossing, and limit sugary snacks and beverages
 - Encourage the use of properly fitted mouth guards to prevent injury if your child plays a sport
 - Ask your child’s dentist about dental sealants for your teenager
 - Sealants provide an extra layer of protection against cavities on the chewing surfaces of back teeth

- Regarding diet: check sugar content of beverages [such as iced teas, juices, energy drinks, sodas etc] and avoid high sugar content drinks, but if they must its best with meal time, and limiting sipping between meals. Be sure to encourage your child to drink fluoridated water. <https://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/nutrition/food-tips/sugary-drinks>

Many snacks children and adolescents eat can be harmful to their mouth. Help children choose more nutritious snacks. These include vegetables, plain yogurt, fruits and cheese, instead of candy, chips and other sugary snacks.

What can adults do to have a healthy mouth?

You can keep your teeth for your lifetime. Follow some of these tips to make sure keeping your mouth healthy.

- Drink plenty of fluoridated water
 - Especially after every meal to wash out some of the negative effects of sticky and acidic foods and beverages
- Practice good oral hygiene
 - Floss between the teeth at least once a day to remove dental plaque
 - Use fluoride toothpaste
 - Always brush before going to bed
 - Use mouthwash- this will reduce the amount of acid in your mouth and clean those hard-to-brush areas in and around the gums
- Visit your dentist at least twice a year, even if you have no natural teeth or have dentures
- Do not use any tobacco products
 - Many smoking cessation medications are covered at no cost to you (ask your health care provider)
 - Call the Special Needs Unit (SNU) to help you find classes or counseling in your area. Just call SNU at 1-855-346-9828 (PA Relay: 711)
 - Reach out to the Pennsylvania Free Quit line
 - 1-877-724-1090 (In person quit counseling)
 - 1-800-QUIT-NOW (Phone based quit counseling)

- Limit alcoholic drinks
- Eat a healthy diet
 - Many dentists recommend eating fresh, crunchy fruits and vegetables instead of mushy processed foods. Fruits and vegetables also contain healthy fiber.
- Chronic conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and immune disorders can put you at risk for poor oral health if not controlled
 - Be sure to keep all appointments with medical and dental practitioners to ensure a healthy body and mouth
- Some medications may cause dry mouth which can lead to issues with your mouth. You can:
 - Ask your doctor for a different medication that may not cause this condition
 - Try over the counter dry mouth products, if recommended by your dentist
 - Drink plenty of water
 - Chew sugarless gum
 - Avoid tobacco products and alcohol
- Help the elderly brush and floss their teeth if they are not able to on their own

Oral health while pregnant

- Oral health is important for you as well as your baby
- Proper oral healthcare decreases the risk of having an early delivery and low birth weight babies
- Ask your ob/gyn to help you make an appointment with a local dentist for a checkup if you do not already have a dentist
 - Gums may be tender and can bleed easily during pregnancy. Talk to your dentist if you are experiencing these issues.
- Stomach acids from vomiting can damage your teeth and lead to cavities. If you are vomiting while pregnant take the following steps to clean your teeth.
 - Rinse your mouth thoroughly with plain tap water to remove stomach acid from your teeth
 - Follow up with a mouthwash with fluoride or use a dab of toothpaste with fluoride on your finger and smear it over your teeth
 - Brush teeth as the last step and rinse well when done

Haven't been to the dentist lately?

We are here to help. Contact Member Services at 1-866-638-1232 (PA Relay: 711) for assistance with scheduling an appointment with a dental provider in your area. Your dentist can provide more oral health care tips and can answer questions you may have.



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