

LOOKING AHEAD FOR DENTAL HEALTH

When your child is 3 to 6 Years Old

What are the most important dental health concepts for this age group?

There are two; first, get regular dental checkups for your child. Even children with apparently clean teeth who don't seem to eat many sweets often develop small cavities. Since the "nerve" in baby teeth is only two millimeters from the outside surface, the decay has often reached this critical area by the time parents see the cavity. Regular checkups keep dental work simple for the children and inexpensive for their parents. The second important thing to remember is that the six-year molars are permanent teeth. This fact is often overlooked because no baby teeth are lost when the six-year molars come through the gums. They are the first permanent teeth to erupt, the largest, and the most important of all the permanent teeth.

How often should my child have a dental checkup?

Six-month checkups are best for most children, but if expense is a concern, talk to your pediatric dentist about designing a customized program. Less frequent checkups with increased parent home care can reduce your cost without sacrificing your child's dental health.

What should I do about my child's sucking habit?

At three years of age most children have already given up their pacifiers, but thumb and finger habits continue longer. The first step is to evaluate whether the habit is causing a significant problem. If the change in tooth position or in the "bite" is small, there is no need to give much attention to the habit. But if there is a crossbite, anterior open bite, or protruding incisors, we should consider a strategy to end the habit. The most effective strategies are individually designed by the pediatric dentist-parent team.

My child doesn't want me to help with brushing. Is that OK?

To get the best combination of tooth cleanliness and child participation, we suggest that parents do the first part of each brushing session with a dry brush. It's better if you don't even put water on it. Put the child's head in your lap so you can really see well, and brush all the surfaces thoroughly. This will take about two minutes. Then encourage the child to finish the job by going to the sink and polishing the teeth with a pea-sized dab of fluoride toothpaste.

When my child has an accident involving teeth, when do I need to call the dentist?

Since most children don't get their permanent upper front teeth until seven years of age, serious accidents in the 3-6

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Santiago A. Surillo, D.D.S., M.S.
Pediatric Dentistry
Orthodontics
Diplomate, American board of
Orthodontics



Kenneth R. Whitcomb, D.D.S.
Diplomate, American board of
Pediatric Dentistry

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years of age group are rare. But accidents to baby teeth should be evaluated by the pediatric dentist if teeth are moved out of position or are broken severely enough to expose the nerve. If you are in doubt, call your pediatric dentist.

Is there a coating that can be applied to my child's teeth to prevent decay?

Yes, these coatings are called pit and fissure sealants and they are very effective in preventing decay in the natural defects of the teeth, mostly on the chewing surfaces. Sealants cannot be used on the smooth surfaces of the teeth so they do not prevent decay between the teeth.

What about flossing?

If you want to buy the world's least expensive, most effective dental insurance, floss your child's teeth once each day. It works! If you absolutely cannot floss every day, aim for a minimum of three times a week.

What is a sensible policy about sugar and decay prevention?

Sugar plays a major role in causing decay, but unless your child is a diabetic, it is not practical to totally eliminate sweets from the diet. Our goal is to decrease the number of times a day that the decay bacteria receive sugar and start

acid production. Also, sugar eaten with other foods causes less decay. Therefore, we suggest this simple policy: "No sugar between meals". This includes fruit juice and dried fruits like raisings. If your child is already getting decay, go one step further and eliminate sugar from lunch. This policy is meant to be a daily guideline, not a rigid rule that would prevent a child from having cake at a friend's birthday party.

How should I prepare my child for dental visits?

If your child has had toddler checkups it will not be necessary to do any additional preparation for checkups. If this is the first checkup, read a "first visit" book to your child at home. If your child needs dental work, we suggest that the less discussion at home, the better. Just the fact that the subject is discussed may signal the child that the parent has some apprehension. There is a certain appeal to the idea of telling the child everything, but our experience with children who have been "prepared" has taught us that this is not the best way for most children. Once the parent starts answering questions it's hard to stop. We suggest never saying "shot" or "hurt". The child knows about immunization shots and there is no way to convince him that an injection in the more flexible tissue of the mouth is easier. It is better to say, "You know how kind the dentist always is with

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you”, than to say, “He won’t hurt you.” The “H word” hangs around in the child’s near memory and increases the tendency to report that a variety of sensations “hurt”. The best answer to many questions is “I don’t know, but the dentist will be very careful with you”. We ask parents to remember that even we adults are apprehensive about some procedures that we totally understand. Of course the dentists and the staff explain each step as we work on a child, but our choice of words has been refined by experience and training and there is no time for the child to analyze the answer and create additional anxiety.

sources to different service areas within their systems.

Do I need to give my child fluoride vitamins?

Only if the water your child usually drinks has less than 0.3 ppm fluoride. You can determine this by calling your water company, your pediatrician, or your pediatric dentist. We can provide you with a Fluori Check Water Analysis Kit, which can determine the fluoride level in your drinking water. Bottled water for both home delivery and market sale comes in both fluoride and non-fluoride types. Reverse osmosis (RO) home filters and market water dispensing machines remove fluoride. If your home address changes, be sure to research the fluoride content of your new water supply, even if your water company does not change. Some water companies supply water from different

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