



ORAL CARE BASICS FOR CHILDREN

by Dr. Dipika T. Shah, D.D.S.

Most pediatric dentists recommend children have their first dental visit at 2–2½ years of age, or once all 20 of the baby (deciduous) teeth have erupted. When you bring your toddler for his first visit, try to make it as pleasant an experience as possible. Take the time to find a dentist who enjoys treating children. Some offices offer cartoon movies, which better prepare children for their first visit. Some dentists also use a “tell, show, do” technique in which they talk to the child about what they are going to do, how it will feel, and what the procedure will look like. Techniques such as these will lessen children’s fears about the visit. Before this initial visit, there are procedures that should be followed to assure good oral hygiene for your baby.

Oral Care After Feedings

Give your baby a bottle filled with water after each feeding of milk or juice, to rinse his mouth. Avoid putting your baby to bed with his bottle because the liquid may pool in his mouth, causing tooth decay. After the eruption of the first baby tooth, nighttime feedings should be stopped entirely. To cleanse your baby’s teeth and gumlines, gently wipe the area after each feeding with clean gauze wrapped around your finger.

Your toddler’s teeth should be cleaned at least twice a day, especially after meals. For a young toddler, you may continue to use gauze wrapped around your finger. Once he’s willing to begin brushing, you should introduce a small, soft toothbrush. Special care should be taken when brushing his teeth to dispense only small amounts of toothpaste.

Proper Intake of Fluoride Doses

Most babies are given supplemental vitamins

beginning in the first year of life. In areas where there is no fluoride in the water, a vitamin/fluoride combination is usually prescribed to children under the age of 2, and a single, chewable fluoride tablet to children above 2 years of age. Supplementary fluoride should only be given to children whose water supply has less than .3 ppm fluoride ion. The proper dosages of fluoride to be given are as follows: 0.25 mg per day for children 6 months–3 years, 0.5 mg per day for 3–6 year olds and 1 mg per day for 6–16 year olds.

Fluoride intake should be thoroughly evaluated before giving any supplemental fluoride. Even if your community water is fluoridated, your child may be drinking non-fluoridated bottled water or you may have a reverse-osmosis filtering system which removes all of the fluoride in the water. On the other hand, juice and baby formulas may be packaged in different water supply areas, making it hard to assess their fluoride content. Pediatricians and dentists should consider this, and any other dietary sources of fluoride, before prescribing supplements.

Monitoring fluoride intake in children is very important. Although proper fluoride intake promotes improved dental health by decreasing the rate of cavities, excessive fluoride intake may lead to fluorosis (white patches on primary or permanent teeth). There has been a large increase in the number of cases of fluorosis seen in the last 15 years due to too much fluoride intake in children, either through fluids or toothpaste ingestion.

This information was supplied by Dr. Dipika Shah. If you have any questions on the care of your child’s teeth, you may reach her at (732) 264-8180 or at smile@dentistnj.com.