

Professional advice and care

Making dental visits a good experience

Start regular dental visits early. This can prevent little problems from becoming big ones. Even if you are checking your child’s teeth regularly, you do not have the special tools and training to see what a dental professional can.

Encourage a positive attitude towards dental visits by following these tips:

- Make appointments at times when your child will not be tired
- Treat the visit as routine – don’t make the visit the high point of the day
- Avoid using negative words such as drill, hurt or needle
- Answer questions honestly, but not too specifically. Dental professionals have special ways of explaining procedures to children.

Added fluoride protection

If your child has tooth decay, a dental professional may recommend some products besides toothpaste to give your child more protection against tooth decay.

Dental sealants

The first adult tooth to appear in the mouth is the ‘6 year molar’. These teeth need to last 80 years or more! The chewing surfaces of molar teeth have pits and grooves that trap plaque and can be impossible

to clean. Dental sealants fill the pits and grooves with a plastic that prevents plaque from getting trapped.

To be most effective, a sealant should be placed shortly after the tooth appears in the mouth. Check with a dental professional when your child is 6 years of age to see if it is time to put sealants in the ‘6 year molars’. Another critical time is 11-12 years of age when the ‘12 year molars’ come in.

If your child has deep pits and grooves in other teeth, your dental professional may advise you that sealants in other teeth may also be of benefit.

Dental sealants don’t last forever. If part of the sealant breaks off or is worn away, tooth decay can start. Regular dental visits will help keep an eye on the sealants.

Thumb and finger sucking

Babies have a natural sucking reflex that begins before birth. They often find it very soothing to suck a thumb, finger or dummy.

For some children prolonged sucking habits cause the front teeth and the surrounding bone to be pushed out of shape. Luckily, most children stop the habit on their own. If the habit continues into preschool years, your dental professional will be happy to provide advice.



The perfect smile

Very few people have teeth that are perfectly straight. Minor differences usually do not cause harm, although they may cause concern. On the other hand, teeth that are not in the proper position can cause problems:

- May be difficult to keep clean and can lead to tooth decay or gum problems
- May make chewing more difficult
- May cause damage and wear to teeth or to lips and cheeks
- May cause distress because they don’t look pleasing.

In many cases, orthodontic treatment (braces) cannot take place until all the permanent teeth are in the mouth – after age 12.

In other cases, some earlier treatment may help to prevent more severe problems arising or may make later orthodontic treatment simpler. Your dental professional can advise you.



A good time to check with your dentist is when your child is about age 9, before the child’s pre-puberty growth spurt.

Sporting interests

Many children start playing sport in primary school. Some habits related to playing sport can affect the teeth. Dehydration from sporting activities can reduce saliva.

Sugary or acidic drinks (including sports drinks) can harm teeth. Energy drinks can be high in caffeine which can affect dental health by changing the way the body handles water and saliva.



Some sports can put players at risk of having a tooth damaged or knocked out. Such damage can have life long consequences.

What to do

- Encourage children to drink plenty of WATER before, during and after sports.
- Discourage use of soft drinks, sports drinks or energy drinks by young athletes.
- Professionally made mouthguards are highly recommended for athletes who play contact sports. Mouthguards should be worn during training as well as during games.

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Only two sets of teeth to last a lifetime!

By 3 years of age, your child will have all 20 primary (baby) teeth. The primary teeth are important for many reasons and need to be taken care of until the adult teeth replace them. Decay in the primary teeth can mean your child may tend to develop decay in the permanent (adult) teeth.



From about 6–12 years of age your child will lose all the baby teeth as the permanent teeth emerge.

These permanent teeth need to last 70–80 years! With a little daily attention to oral care and diet from an early age, your child can have healthy teeth for a lifetime.



Starting from 6 years of age baby teeth are replaced with adult teeth

Oral care at home

What your child does at home everyday is essential to staying healthy! Children learn how to take care of themselves from parents, siblings and carers. Children learn so much just by imitating those around them.

Tooth brushing

Plaque is the sticky, soft layer of bacteria that forms on teeth everyday. Plaque needs to be removed each day to prevent tooth decay and gum problems. Studies show that brushing twice a day reduces the risk of tooth decay much more than just brushing once a day. Brushing before bedtime is especially important.



Children should be encouraged to brush their own teeth. However, children do not have the coordination needed to use a toothbrush properly until they are about 8 or 9. For this reason, parents or carers need to assist with thorough brushing at least once a day.

Toothpaste

Fluoride protection against tooth decay is needed throughout life. Using fluoride toothpaste twice a day is one of the most proven ways for you and your children to stay decay-free. Fluoride in toothpaste makes teeth more resistant to the acids produced after eating or drinking. Fluoride also puts back minerals that are lost from teeth and can reverse the early stages of tooth decay.

Because children under the age of 6 tend to swallow rather than spit out excess toothpaste, they need to use low fluoride toothpaste, such as Colgate® Sparkling Mint Gel 2–6.



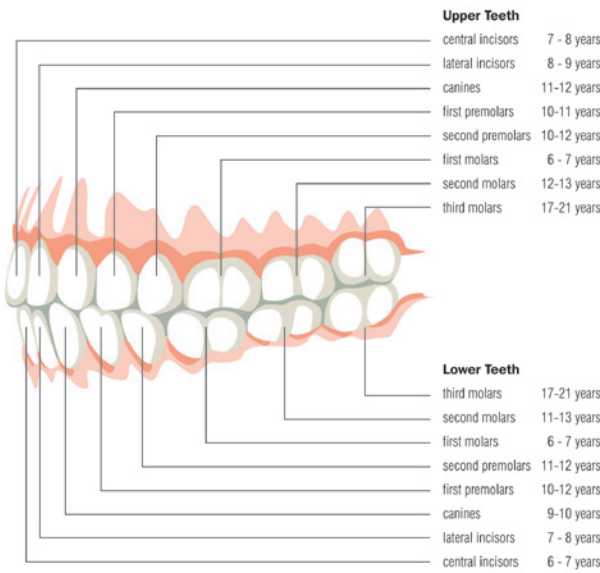
Colgate Sparkling Mint Gel 2–6 toothpaste was developed with leading dental professionals for use in children under the age of 6.

After age 6, children should use a toothpaste with more fluoride, such as Colgate® Sparkling Mint Gel 6+.

Only a pea-sized amount of paste is needed. All toothpaste needs to be stored out of the reach of children.

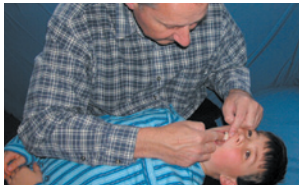


When do permanent teeth erupt?



Flossing

Dental floss is used to remove plaque between teeth where a toothbrush can't reach. Parents and carers should start flossing children's teeth when the teeth start fitting close together.



It is a good idea to get some coaching from a dental professional. It isn't easy to floss someone else's teeth! By the age of 13 children should be able to floss without help or supervision.

Have a look

Plaque is not easy to see unless there is lots of it. Plaque disclosing tablets contain a food dye that stains plaque so it is easier to see. Use plaque disclosing tablets occasionally to help you and your child see places missed with the toothbrush and floss. Disclosing tablets can be purchased at pharmacies.



Parents are encouraged to look in their children's mouths regularly. Gently 'lift the lip' and look for white spots at the gumline, particularly on the upper teeth. The white spots may be an early sign of tooth decay. Seek professional advice if you see white spots at the gumline in your child's mouth.

Tooth friendly diet

Eating patterns are just as important as the types of foods and drinks children have. The risk of tooth decay can increase if children eat too often throughout the day.

Saliva is the body's natural defence against tooth decay – constantly replacing the minerals in teeth and washing away acids. To give saliva enough time to work, limit the number of times your child eats throughout the day.



A general rule of thumb is to limit eating times to 3 meals and 2 snacks each day.

'Tooth friendly' food and drink tips:

- Encourage healthy snacks such as dairy products, unsalted popcorn, fruits and vegetables in place of sugary snacks
- Keep healthy snacks readily available for children to grab
- Limit intake of acidic drinks such as soft drinks (diet and regular), sports drinks, fruit juices, fruit drinks, cordials – don't sip on them too long and limit how often you have them
- Drink water! (Note: not all bottled water has fluoride to help prevent tooth decay).