



Infant Dental Care: Guidance for Parents and Caregivers

Gum and Tooth Care

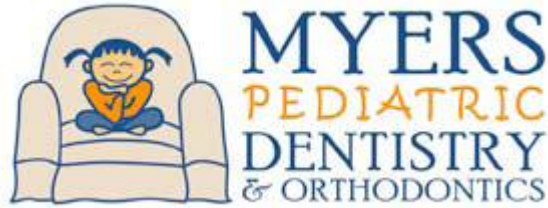
- Wipe down your baby's gums with a wet washcloth even before your child has teeth, especially once you have introduced solids. Once teeth erupt, wipe your baby's teeth with a wet washcloth or toothbrush. A washcloth is insufficient to clean teeth with grooves, so you need to transition to a toothbrush once these erupt. Toothpaste is unnecessary; toothpaste with fluoride may even be hazardous to a child until he or she learns to spit the toothpaste out. Using a lap to lap method with a partner may make brushing easier with a resistant infant or child. Your pediatric dentist can further explain this technique at the infant dental exam. Develop good brushing habits and patterns early. Once solids have been introduced, it is critical that brushing occur every evening before bedtime. Be sure to avoid letting your baby fall asleep with a bottle of milk or formula.

Diet

- While sugars - naturally occurring and those added - don't cause cavities themselves, they are a part of the decay equation. Begin establishing healthy dietary habits when your child is learning to eat, because bad habits are hard to break in a two-year old (or even a 16-year old)! There are many products marketed for infants and toddlers that have a high sugar content, so be careful to read your labels when choosing foods, especially snacks. Your pediatric dentist can be a great resource in helping you establish good dietary practices in your household by identifying the foods in your diet that commonly contribute to decay.

Sippy Cups

- Encourage your infant to drink out of a cup by age one to encourage the onset of more advanced swallowing patterns. Although sippy cups can be invaluable in certain situations, exclusive use may prolong the infant sucking pattern and hinder normal development. Since most children sip out of these containers for extended periods of time, be careful what you fill them with as well. Even watered down 100% fruit juice poses a potential problem due to the frequency of sugar bathing the teeth, so give juice only with meals.



Bacteria Transmission

- Sweets don't necessarily cause cavities in children - acid producing bacteria does. Children don't start out their lives with this bacteria living in their mouth. Most children get their bacteria from their mom or primary caregiver between 18 and 36 months of age. So if a mom has a lot of decay or high levels of "bad" bacteria, it is more likely that her child will too. The sooner the "bad" bacteria infiltrates the mouth, the higher a child's risk for cavities. Therefore, it is important to keep a mom's mouth healthy when her child is 0 - 2 years old for the sake of the child's dental health. Your pediatric dentist can provide ways to reduce your bacteria that will benefit both you and your child.

Fluoride

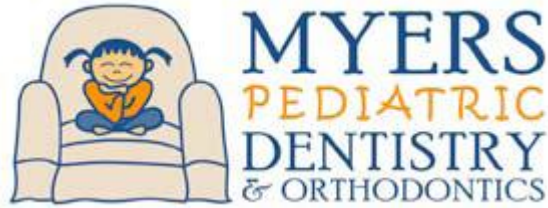
- There is debate even within the dental community on this issue. Fluoride can be a great tool in cavity prevention; however fluorosis is caused by too much fluoride. Supplementation should be dependent on your infant's risk level and individual situation. Be wary of using "nursing water" to make formula without speaking with a pediatric dentist, as most formulas have fluoride. For infants at high risk of developing cavities, fluoride is simply one tool of many we may choose to use to prevent future decay and lower your child's risk level.

Breastfeeding

- Breastfeeding is the best thing you can do for your child nutritionally; however, once baby teeth have erupted, demand feeding at night may place your child at a greater risk for Early Childhood Caries. While the infant sucking pattern protects the teeth from contact with mother's milk, sleeping infants will commonly hold the milk in their mouths without swallowing it - leaving it to pool around your baby's teeth for hours at a time.

Teething

- You may notice drooling due to teething even months before your child's first teeth erupt. This is not unusual. Typically, babies tend to be a little fussy while their teeth are erupting, and parents want something to help soothe the pain. You may wish to try an over the counter oral gel for teething or rely on homeopathic options like gripe water. Just be sure to wipe your child's teeth and gums well if the agent has a high sugar content.



Tooth Eruption

- While there is a typical eruption pattern and average age range associated with a tooth's eruption, do not be too alarmed if your child does not follow the chart exactly. Some children's teeth erupt out of "order," while others may get their teeth much later than average. Your pediatric dentist can detect if there are problematic eruption patterns or development issues.

First Dental Visit

- The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry recommends babies visit the dentist sometime after the first tooth erupts but no later than age one. The American Academy of Pediatrics also recommends high cavity risk infants be seen at this time. A significant number of children develop decay by the time they are three with great financial and emotional cost to their families. These cavities may be preventable with early education and the development of positive oral habits. Since we emphasize individualized care, strong communication, and dental education within our practice; we make sure your baby's first dental visit is tailored to you and your family's needs. The age 1 appointment is generally covered by insurance or is a \$67 office visit for self-pay.