

Expert Column

Dental Care For Children

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Oral health is the key indicator of overall health, well-being and quality of life. Though healthy teeth are important for a child's overall health, dental care in children is often neglected assuming that milk teeth will eventually fall off but that is not the case. Children should be taught about the importance of brushing their teeth regularly to remove bacteria from their mouths. They should be educated that preserving their milk teeth is important since they form the basis of emerging permanent teeth. Taking care of the teeth from the beginning can help prevent several problems like tooth decay that can subsequently cause pain & inability to eat & chew, bad breath that might affect a child's confidence, gums swelling, misalignment of teeth and others. Dental hygiene should begin when the child is an infant that involves the use of cotton or gauze pads to gently clean the gum pads, inner surfaces of the cheek & tongue for any food or liquid residues.

How to guide kids to maintain oral hygiene?

As soon as the first tooth erupts in the oral cavity, soft-bristle toothbrushes especially designed for children should be used. Young children initially require parent's guidance to get into the habit of brushing. Parents must hold their hands to guide them while they brush. Clean every tooth thoroughly and brush the inside, outside and chewing surfaces of teeth gently in small circles. After brushing, encourage your child to spit out toothpaste, not to swallow it or rinse with water. Place the timer for 2 min while they brush or play any of their favorite songs to keep them

motivated. Include fluoridated toothpaste in the regime after 3-4 years of age once the child learns to spit after brushing.

Kids who eat a lot of sugary foods and drinks are at high risk for cavities. It is important to make healthy food choices. Avoid too much sugar. Excess of soda, fruit juice, or sweetened drinks should be avoided. Sweet snacks and drinks between meals must be limited.

Tips for parents —

If your child does have sugar, make sure they brush their teeth afterward. Good dental hygiene & oral habits begin with parents. If they see you religiously brushing & flossing every day, it will make them want to follow you. Make sure they watch you brush twice a day & make it look like you are having a great time removing all the bad bacteria & germs from your mouth. You will notice that your child will start following you in no time.

Visiting a pediatric dentist is also essential from as early as one year of age. This visit gives a child an opportunity to meet the dentist in a non-threatening and friendly way. At this time the dentist can give you information on nursing bottle caries, thumb sucking or tongue thrusting habits, pacifier habits or teething. This also establishes the good habit of regular dental checkups & to detecting the problems early before they progress. It will also help to develop a positive approach to visiting dentists which will motivate the children to take care of their teeth.

**Take away message for kids**

1. Brush and floss every day.
2. Visit dentists regularly.
3. Eat healthy food.
4. Rinse after every meal.