

Tipsheet: Dental Care Tips for All

Preventive measures are critical in oral health. Following these measures will be much cheaper (and less painful) in the long run. It's never too early to start your child on a healthy routine!

Sugar in the mouth can cause bacteria to over-produce and invade gum tissue and release toxins. This can lead to serious problems such as gingivitis and periodontal disease. That's why it is so important to keep your baby's mouth clean and brush your child's and your own teeth regularly.

Babies & Toddlers

- Thoroughly clean your baby's gums after each feeding with a water-soaked washcloth or gauze pad to stimulate gum tissue and remove food. This should be done even before the teeth start erupting.
- Once a baby's teeth start to erupt, brush them gently with a small, soft-bristled toothbrush using a pea-sized amount of fluoridated toothpaste—it inhibits decay. Fluoride is also found in mouth rinses, community water supplies and in some foods.
- If you give your child a bedtime bottle, the best liquid to use is water. Water doesn't contain sugar and cannot be used to produce enamel-damaging acid.
- Never give a baby a pacifier dipped in sugary substances (e.g., honey, powdered sugar). These are very bad for a baby's mouth.
- Schedule your child's first dental appointment around the time of their first tooth (usually between 6-12 months).
- Begin teaching proper brushing techniques at age 2 or 3. As the parent, you will need to follow-up on brushing and flossing until your child is 7 or 8, when they have the dexterity to do it correctly themselves.

Kids, Teens & Adults

- Encourage your child to discuss any fears he/she might have about going to the dentist but don't use the words "hurt" and "pain." Saying "It won't hurt" instills the possibility of pain in the child's thought process.
- Determine if your water supply contains fluoride. If it isn't fluoridated, discuss supplement options with your dental hygienist.
- Replace your child's and your toothbrush 3-4 times per year and after every illness to minimize bacteria and germs.
- Limit the amount of sugar your child eats by encouraging him/her to eat fruits and vegetables for snacks instead of candy and cookies. Limit the amount of snacking between meals and make sure they brush afterwards.
- If your child has braces, be sure to check out special orthodontic toothbrushes. Orthodontic appliances (retainers) also require daily care. Soak appliance daily in a denture-cleansing bath and rinse thoroughly before reinserting into mouth. Children with braces may need more frequent dental visits.
- Teeth should be brushed at least twice per day, after breakfast and before bedtime and between snacks, too.
- Mouth guards should be worn at all times—by children and adults—when playing contact sports, sports that involve a ball and extreme sports.
- If your child (or you) has an injury to the mouth, call your dentist immediately.
- If a permanent tooth comes out of the mouth (because of injury), push it back into place or place it in milk and go to the dental office. If it is a primary tooth (aka a "baby tooth") do not reimplant the tooth.
- Have your teeth cleaned twice a year, every six months.
- Most important of all—set a good example for your child. Brush and floss your own teeth regularly, eat healthy foods, and schedule regular dental appointments. Remind your child of the importance of good oral health and the role nutrition plays in maintaining it.



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Seniors

- Full or partial dentures should be brushed daily with a soft toothbrush or denture-cleaning brush, using a commercial dental paste or powder. Never use toxic or abrasive household cleaners. Dentures should be brushed inside and out and rinsed with cool water.
- Remaining natural teeth and gums, especially teeth supporting a partial denture, should be brushed regularly.
- When not in use, dentures should be covered with water or denture-cleaning solution to prevent drying.
- If you have arthritis or limited use of your hands, try adapting your toothbrush for easier use. Insert the handle into a rubber ball or sponge hair curler. Handles can be lengthened with a piece of wood or plastic, such as a ruler or popsicle stick. An electric toothbrush is a great alternative; it's been proven as an excellent plaque remover and a good way to stimulate the gums.

Sources: kidshealth.org, saveyoursmile.com, American Dental Health Association www.adha.org, Delta Dental Minnesota www.deltadentalmn.org

Need dental referrals or dental coverage assistance? Check out United Way 2-1-1™/The Twin Cities Beehive.com