



Oral Health Challenges for Children with Disabilities

Some children with disabilities have challenges that affect their oral health. These challenges may include:



- **Children with physical disabilities**, such as cerebral palsy ([/English/health-issues/conditions/developmental-disabilities/Pages/Cerebral-Palsy.aspx](#)), may not have the motor skills needed to use a toothbrush safely or to sit still in a dental chair during dental visits.
- **Children with intellectual disabilities** ([/English/health-issues/conditions/developmental-disabilities/Pages/Intellectual-Disability.aspx](#)) may not know how to brush their teeth, protect their teeth from injury, or cooperate with dental office staff while getting oral health care.
- **Children with communication disorders** ([/English/health-issues/conditions/adhd/Pages/Learning-Motor-Skills-and-Communication-Disorders.aspx](#)), such as delayed speech and language development ([/English/ages-stages/toddler/Pages/Language-Delay.aspx](#)), may not be able to tell their parents that their mouth hurts or they have a toothache ([/English/tips-tools/Symptom-Checker/Pages/Toothache.aspx](#)).
- **Children who get frequent medical care**, such as having many doctor visits or hospital stays, may be afraid of the dental office and may not cooperate during visits.
- **Children who take medicines with added sugars or that cause dry mouth** are at high risk for tooth decay ([/English/healthy-living/oral-health/Pages/Preventing-Tooth-Decay-in-Children.aspx](#)). Sugar is added to some medicines to make them taste better. Other medicines used to treat cerebral palsy, seizures ([/English/health-issues/conditions/head-neck-nervous-system/Pages/Seizures-Convulsions-and-Epilepsy.aspx](#)), and depression ([/English/health-issues/conditions/emotional-problems/Pages/Childhood-Depression-What-Parents-Can-Do-To-Help.aspx](#)) can cause dry mouth by lowering the amount of saliva in the mouth. Saliva plays an important role in preventing tooth decay. Medicines given to children with medical diseases or disorders, such as asthma ([/English/health-issues/conditions/allergies-asthma/Pages/Asthma-Medicines-Long-term-Control.aspx](#)) or allergies ([/English/health-issues/conditions/allergies-asthma/Pages/Allergy-Medicines.aspx](#)), can also cause dry mouth.
- **Children on special diets** may be at high risk for developing tooth decay. Foods that are soft or high in starch (for example, potatoes or corn) stick to children's teeth and give caries-causing bacteria in the mouth more time to cause tooth decay.

Additional Information:

- Continuing Education: Practical Oral Health Care for People with Developmental Disabilities (http://www.nidcr.nih.gov/OralHealth/Topics/DevelopmentalDisabilities/ContinuingEducation_mobile.htm) (NIH.gov)

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