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Dental care - child

Proper care of your child's teeth and gums includes brushing and rinsing daily. It also includes having routine dental exams, and getting necessary treatments such as fluoride, sealants, extractions, fillings, or braces and other orthodontics.

Information

Your child must have healthy teeth and gums for overall good health. Injured, diseased, or poorly developed teeth can result in:

- Poor nutrition
- Painful and dangerous infections
- Problems with speech development
- Problems with facial and jaw bone development
- Poor self-image
- Bad bite

CARING FOR AN INFANT'S TEETH

Even though newborns and infants do not have teeth, it is important to take care of their mouth and gums. Follow these tips:

- Use a damp washcloth to wipe your infant's gums after each meal.
- Do not put your infant or young child to bed with a bottle of milk, juice, or sugar water. Use only water for bedtime bottles.
- Begin using a soft toothbrush instead of a washcloth to clean your child's teeth as soon as their first tooth shows (usually between 5 and 8 months of age).
- Ask your child's health care provider if your infant needs to take oral fluoride.

THE FIRST TRIP TO THE DENTIST

- Your child's first visit to the dentist should be between the time the first tooth appears and the time when all the primary teeth are visible (before 2 1/2 years).
- Many dentists recommend a "trial" visit. This can help your child get used to the sights, sounds, smells, and feel of the office before their actual exam.

- Children who are used to having their gums wiped and teeth brushed every day will be more comfortable going to the dentist.

CARING FOR A CHILD'S TEETH

- Brush your child's teeth and gums at least twice each day and especially before bed.
- Let children brush on their own to learn the habit of brushing, but you should supervise and do the real brushing for them.
- Take your child to a dentist every 6 months. Let the dentist know if your child is a thumb sucker or breathes through the mouth.
- Teach your child how to play safe and what to do if a tooth is broken or knocked out. If you act quickly, you can often save the tooth.
- When your child has teeth, they should begin flossing each evening before going to bed.
- Your child may need orthodontic treatment to prevent long-term problems.

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