



Advice sheet for pregnancy and dental care for young children

Should I visit my dentist during pregnancy and is it safe?

Yes, it is very important to keep visiting your dentist while you are pregnant. Due to hormonal changes you may notice that your gums bleed more easily during pregnancy. This means that you need to maintain a very high level of oral hygiene by visiting both your dentist and hygienist regularly.

As a general rule, dentists prefer to avoid carrying out x-rays while people are pregnant. However, should you be required to have an x-ray, your dentist should be able to offer you a lead apron to wear over your stomach.

When will my child's teeth come through?

Baby or deciduous teeth have usually developed before your child is born and will start to come through at around 6 months. All 20 baby teeth should be through by the age of two. The first permanent adult teeth will appear at about 6 years of age, behind the baby teeth and before the first ones have fallen out at about 6 or 7 years old. It is usually the lower front teeth that are lost first, followed by the upper front teeth shortly after. All permanent teeth, except wisdom teeth, should be in place by the age of 13. The wisdom teeth may erupt any time between 18-25 years of age.

What will be the impact of teething on my child?

Most children suffer some teething pains. Babies may have a high temperature when they are teething and their cheeks may appear red and feel warm to the touch. They may also have upset tummies and dribble more than usual. There are special teething gels that can be used to reduce the pain. In addition teething rings are available which are cooled in the fridge prior to use.

How should I clean my child's teeth?

Cleaning your child's teeth should be part of their daily hygiene routine. Ideally this routine should comprise cleaning for 2 minutes twice daily in the morning and at night. You may find it easier to stand or sit behind your child, cradling their chin in your hand so you can reach their top and bottom teeth more easily.

When the first teeth start to come through, try using a children's tooth brush with a pea sized blob of toothpaste. Always use fluoride based toothpaste. It is important for an adult to brush your child's teeth at least until the age of 8 years old. Don't forget to clean behind the teeth and onto the gums! It often helps to let your child have their own tooth brush to chew on and do a little brushing, whilst keeping a separate, neater toothbrush for parents to use to, clean their child's teeth.



...something to smile about



When should I take my child to the dentist?

It is recommended that children should go to the dentist with their parents as soon as possible. This will let them get used to the noises, smells and surroundings and prepare them for future visits. The earlier these visits begin, the more relaxed the children will be so we recommend that even babies accompany their parents or siblings to routine check ups from birth.

What if my child is very nervous about visiting the dentist?

Children can sense fear in their parents, so it is important not to let your child feel that a visit to the dentist is something to be worried about. If you have any fears of your own about going to the dentist, try not to discuss them in front of your child. If your child does need to have any dental treatment, try to be as supportive and encouraging as possible.

Should I give my child sweets as a treat?

There is no harm in giving your child sweets as an occasional treat. However, when you give sweets and how they are eaten does have a huge impact on the likelihood of the child developing dental decay. The level of dental decay increases proportionately with the length of time that the teeth are exposed to sugar and the frequency of this exposure.

It is best for a child to have sweets at a meal time when saliva flow is at its highest and therefore acid from decay creating bacteria can be minimised. It is also recommended not to give your child food one hour before bedtime due to the reduced saliva flows during sleep. In terms of frequency it is better for your child to consume all of their sweets at the same time rather than having multiple occurrences of smaller amounts. Whenever your child does consume sweets it is important for you to ensure that their teeth are thoroughly cleaned with fluoride toothpaste as soon as possible afterwards. Additionally, if you are giving your child sweets, it is useful to give them an alkali based food (such as a postage stamp sized amount of cheese) after they have finished the sweets.

What drinks are safe for my child's teeth?

The best drinks to give your child, particularly if they are using a sucky cup or bottle, are milk or water. If you do give your child squash, it is important to check that it is sugar free and to ensure that it is not drunk at night time when saliva flows are lower.

What can my dentist do to prevent me and my child getting decay?

Your dentist or hygienist will show you the best methods for brushing and flossing to remove the bacterial plaque which forms on your teeth and gums. When you eat and drink something sugary this plaque turns the sugar into acid which will cause tooth decay and gum inflammation. Fissure sealants can be placed from the age of 7 or 8 and this can prevent adult teeth from getting decay.

Fluoride helps teeth resist decay, which is why it is important to use fluoride based toothpaste. If your dentist thinks that additional fluoride would be useful, they may recommend applying fluoride gel, rinses, tablets or drops.

...something to smile about



What if my baby sucks their thumb or needs a dummy?

If you can, avoid using a dummy and discourage thumb sucking once your baby has developed teeth as this could lead to misalignment of teeth in later years. Never dip your baby's dummy into honey, fruit juices or any other sugary substances. This is particularly to be avoided at bed time as these can expose your baby's teeth to harmful acids that can attack the newly formed teeth and cause decay.



What if my child damages a tooth?

It is not uncommon for a damaged baby tooth to turn pink or grey and discolour over time due to trauma. If your child knocks a baby tooth out completely try not to panic. Fold up a clean handkerchief, place it over the socket and get your child to bite on it for 15 minutes. This should stop the bleeding. Whatever they have done to their baby tooth be reassured it is unlikely to affect their adult teeth when they come through.

If a child knocks out an adult tooth then please see the advice in the emergency section of our website and visit a dentist as soon as possible. If the tooth is knocked out completely then it is best to store it in milk or in the child's mouth.

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