

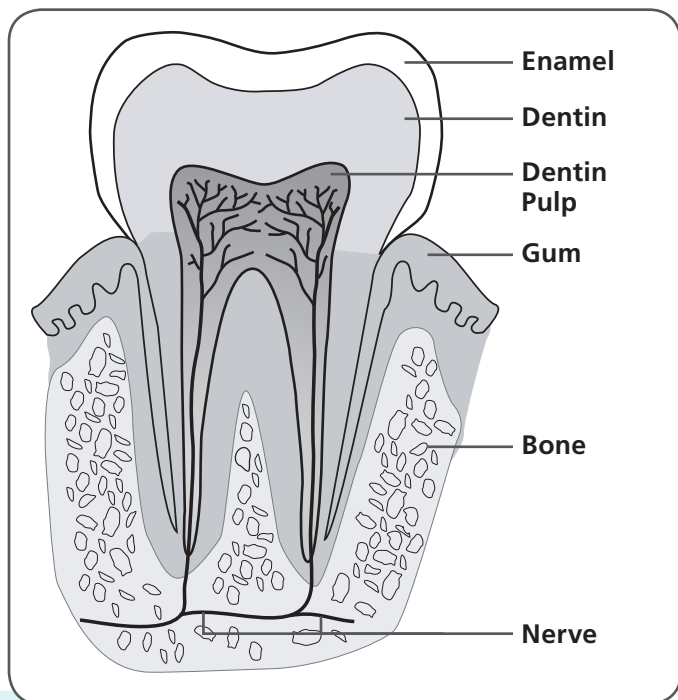
Let's Talk About...

Dental Care

Healthy teeth are an important building block to a life of good health. Strong teeth allow the digestive tract to work well and add to a beautiful smile. New parents should begin caring for their child's teeth as soon as the baby is born.

What is tooth decay?

Everyone has bacteria in their mouth. When we eat, some bacteria cause the sugars in our food to change into an acid. The acid and bacteria join together to form a sticky substance called plaque (plak) that sticks to teeth. The plaque attacks teeth by destroying the enamel which is the hard outer layer of the tooth. This is called a cavity. If the cavity is not treated, the decay will move into the inner layers of the tooth. It can be painful if decay reaches the nerve in the center of the tooth. If left untreated, a cavity can cause problems with permanent teeth.



How should I care for my newborn's teeth?

Your child has 20 teeth at birth, many are just under the gum surface. You can start caring for teeth even before they break through the gum. Rub a damp washcloth over your child's gums to prevent a buildup of damaging bacteria. As soon as the teeth show, brush them with a soft toothbrush or a clean piece of cloth or gauze. You should start flossing once your baby has at least 2 teeth that touch.

What is baby bottle tooth decay?

Many liquids fed to babies contain sugar, including milk, formula, fruit juice, sodas, and other sweetened drinks. They can pool around teeth and gums. If the sugars stay in your infant's mouth for a long time, tooth decay can start. It is easy to prevent this from happening. Wipe or brush your child's teeth and gums after every feeding. Do not allow your child to walk around with a cup or bottle of sweet liquid. Never allow a child to fall asleep with a bottle. If your child refuses to sleep without a bottle, only fill the bottle with water.

If your child sleeps with a bottle of sweet liquid now, begin weaning off of the liquid. Start mixing it with a little water each night. Keep adding more and more water each time so that after a little while your child is sleeping with a bottle of water.

How soon should my child see a dentist?

The American Dental Association recommends that children see a dentist before their first birthday. At the first visit, the dentist will give your child a modified exam and explain how to brush and floss the correct way. Visits at this young age will help your child get used to going to the dentist. This will help your child be more comfortable with the idea of going to the dentist when older.

You may want to take your child to a pediatric dentist or one who specializes in treating children. Their primary goal is to prevent problems from developing by regular exams and stressing proper daily care.

How can I prevent cavities in my child?

- Brush your child's teeth with fluoride toothpaste after eating. If that isn't possible, be sure to brush your child's teeth at least twice a day, especially before bedtime. Brush the teeth up and down in a circular motion. Children as young as 2 or 3 can begin to use toothpaste, as long as they are supervised. A pea-size amount of toothpaste is all that a toddler needs. Make sure the toothpaste is spit out instead of swallowed.



- Floss between each of your child's teeth at least once a day. Children can be taught to floss their own teeth when they are 7 or 8 years old.
- Sealants, which are made from a resin, can be applied to keep bacteria away from permanent teeth. This is especially helpful on the molars (back teeth), because they are hard to reach and can be missed when brushing, allowing cavities to form.
- Limit the amount of sweets and sodas that your child eats. Be sure your child has regular dental check-ups.

Why does my child need crowns or caps?

A dentist may decide to put a stainless steel crown on your child's tooth if the tooth is broken. Another reason for crowns or caps is if there is a lot of decay or malformation of your child's baby teeth. A small amount of decay will destroy a baby tooth very quickly. The crown protects the tooth by preventing the decay from spreading.

If your child has many problems in the mouth or has to have a complicated dental procedure, the dentist may recommend general anesthesia. With this medicine, your child will sleep during the procedure. Good dental hygiene (brushing and flossing) can help prevent the need for a lot of dental work.

Does my special needs child have special dental needs?

Some special children tend to have more tooth decay and gum disease. They may require medicine or a special diet that lead to tooth decay. If dental care is started early and followed regularly, many dental problems can be reduced or avoided.

Some children need more support to feel comfortable. A pediatric dentist can work with you to select a technique based on the specific healthcare needs of your child. Pediatric dentists have 2 more years of advanced training that focuses on children with special needs.

What should I know about mouth injuries?

Mouth injuries may include teeth that have been knocked out, forced out of position, or broken. Lips, gums and cheeks may have been cut. Mouth injuries can be painful and should be treated by a dentist as soon as possible.

If a tooth has been knocked out, gently rinse it off and put it in a cup of milk or wrap it in a clean cloth or gauze. This will keep the tooth moist and safe. Go to the dentist right away. The tooth can often be replanted successfully within an hour of the injury.

If the tooth is broken, the dentist can smooth it with a special drill. Sometimes the tooth can be restored with a filling. Your child may need a crown to repair the tooth.

To prevent dental injuries, do not let your child wear retainers, bridges or partial dentures when playing sports. Have your child wear a properly fitted mouth guard.

How do I take care of my child after dental surgery?

Your child should not eat anything sticky, hard or chewy for one day. Offer soft foods like yogurt or applesauce instead. Have your child take the pain medicine as prescribed by your dentist. A small amount of bleeding is normal.

If your child has a tooth pulled, a blood clot forms in the empty socket to stop the blood from flowing. Avoid having your child drink through a straw or rinse the mouth very hard. This could dislodge the clot and may cause bleeding again. For the first few days, your child should brush carefully around the socket and rinse gently. For pain and swelling, apply a cold cloth or an ice bag to your child's cheek.