



Toddlers and Oral Health

Children should see a dentist regularly, but parents need to help with brushing and flossing while they are at a young age. Show children how to brush and floss, letting them do it themselves and then finishing yourself, to remove all plaque. Usually by age five, children are able to be responsible for their own oral health routine.

Your child's first dental visit

By the time your child reaches age one, they may be ready for their first dental visit.¹ Eliminate surprises by asking your dentist what a first appointment is like. Then talk to your child about what to expect. Remember to bring your child's medical records to the appointment. The first dental visit may include:

- An examination of the teeth, jaw, bite, gums and oral tissues and a gentle cleaning to remove plaque
- An assessment of the need for fluoride
- X-rays (depending on age) and a discussion on whether sealants are a good option

If your child becomes uncooperative, you might consider a series of short, successive visits, which can help build trust in the dentist and ease anxiety for future visits.

Why fluoride?

Fluoride's ability to inhibit or even reverse the progression of dental caries (tooth decay) is well-documented. Especially when use is begun early in a child's oral health routine. The success of water

fluoridation in preventing and controlling dental caries led to the development of fluoride-containing products such as toothpaste and mouthrinse.²

Avoiding sugary drinks

The consumption of sugary drinks, such as soda and juice, in the United States has increased over the last 30 years among children and adults. Sugary drinks have been linked to poor diet quality, weight gain, obesity and type 2 diabetes.³ It is important to start your child on healthy alternatives to sugary foods and drinks early so they learn healthy behaviors while they're young.

Healthy habits begin at home, so teaching children good oral habits and to avoid sugar early on will help them develop healthy habits for years to come.

¹"Child's First Dental Visit", Delta Dental Plans Association, <http://oralhealth.deltadental.com/Child/DentalVisit/22,Delta98,accessed 4/2017>.

²"Recommendations for Using Fluoride to Prevent and Control Dental Caries in the United States", Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5014a1.htm,accessed 4/2017.

³"Consumption of Sugar Drinks in the United States, 2005-2008", Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db71.htm,accessed 4/2017.