

Dental Care for Dental Health

DENTAL CARE:

*Preventative care for teeth means less extensive
and less expensive care in the future.*

Tooth decay happens faster in children than in adults, so care should start when your child is an infant. Healthy baby teeth are crucial in helping a child learn to speak properly. Taking care of gums and teeth will help ensure your child can chew food comfortably and gain more from the nutrients. Below are several ways to help care for your child's teeth and gums.

- **Begin tooth brushing early on.** Start by wiping your baby's gums with a wet washcloth. This removes plaque that accumulates, and gets him accustomed to a plaque-free mouth. Use a toothbrush as soon as he has teeth. Make it a fun activity rather than a chore. Use just a pea-sized amount of toothpaste. Let him brush his own teeth, but until he is about six years-old, you should always brush them as well. This is because younger children usually lack the manual dexterity to brush teeth effectively. Brush teeth at least twice a day.
- **Use fluoride.** Fluoride has been the single most important element in cutting down cavities. It incorporates itself in tooth enamel, making it more difficult for acid to attack. Generally, children get adequate amounts of fluoride if their home uses a municipal water supply. If the town doesn't use fluoride in its water, or your water is from another source, check with your dentist or physician about giving your child fluoride supplements. Be sure your child doesn't swallow fluoride toothpaste. This could lead to him having too much fluoride, a condition known as "fluorosis," that results in brown spots on teeth.
- **Floss regularly** to help remove pieces of food that get stuck between teeth, which provide a source for bacteria. Dental decay results from bacteria digesting food particles, creating acid as a by-product. The acid eats into tooth enamel. Floss your children's teeth daily until they are able to do it themselves, at around seven years old.
- **Eat fewer sugars and carbohydrates.** Bacteria love sugar found in things like candy, fruit and milk, and carbohydrates in foods like chips, pasta and bread. Be careful of gooey foods like raisins and peanut butter. They tend to stick to teeth, providing a constant food supply for bacteria. Remind children to wash down foods with a beverage, preferably water. If possible, children should brush after each meal.
- **Have a dentist** put dental sealants on your child's teeth. Dental sealants are clear, protective, non-toxic coatings applied to the tooth surface, particularly molars. These are teeth at the back of the mouth used for grinding food. Nearly 84 percent of all cavities occur in these teeth because they contain small pits and grooves where bacteria grow. An application of sealant prevents bacteria and food particles from settling into these teeth. Sealants can be applied after permanent molars come in, at about six years-old. They last four to five years.
- **Visit your dentist** for a check-up twice a year. Regular visits enable dentists to detect problems early on. They also familiarize your child with her dentist and get her used to someone working in her mouth. That will make her feel more comfortable if she needs to have a procedure done on her teeth.

For information about your child care needs, please call Child Care Resource at (802) 863-3367.