

A Child's First Dental Visit

FACT SHEET – PREPARING THEM

Experts recommend taking a child to the dentist for the first time when the first tooth come into the mouth (erupt) and no later than the first birthday.

Your child's first dental visit will help you and your child feel comfortable with the dentist. We recommend that only one parent attends the visit, it will be easier for the child to follow the directions of one parent and the dentist, and it will allow the dentist to focus on your child and answer your questions without taking to much time; procedures tend to be brief because children tend to have a very short attention span. The first visit often lasts 30 to 45 minutes. If both parents want to participate, we recommend alternating the parent attending the visits.

Depending on your child's age, the visit may include a full exam of the teeth, jaws, bite, gums, and oral tissues to check growth and development. If needed, your child may also have a gentle cleaning. This includes polishing teeth and removing any plaque, tartar, and stains. The pediatric dentist may show you and your child proper home cleaning, flossing and advise you on the need for fluoride.

Radiographs are rarely taken on children under the age of 3, but your child's dentist may recommend it earlier if needed.

At this time, the dentist can give you information on:

- Diet and infant feeding practices
- Oral hygiene: brushing and flossing
- Dental development and teething
- Oral habits like pacifier, finger-sucking, baby bottle and sippy cups
- Fluoride
- Trauma



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PREPARE YOUR CHILD

If possible, schedule morning appointments so young children are alert and fresh.

If you have not started cleaning your baby's teeth and gums, please begin a routine in the morning and nighttime. Lay the baby down in bed and wipe and brush the gums and teeth; your baby will be more familiar with the procedure by the time you come to your first appointment.

Prepare a preschooler or older child for the visit by giving him or her a general idea of what to expect. Explain why it is important to go to the dentist. Build excitement and understanding. There are great videos and books you can review with your child.

PREPARE YOURSELF

Discuss your questions and concerns with the dentist. Remember that your feelings toward dental visits can be quite different from your child's. Be honest with your view of the dentist.

If you have dental anxieties, be careful not to relate those fears or dislikes to your child. Parents need to give moral support by staying calm while in the dental exam room.

Children can pick up parents' anxieties and become anxious themselves.



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PREPARE THE DENTIST

At the first visit, give the dentist your child's complete health history. If there is anything you think will make your child more comfortable, discuss it with the dentist or the assistant before the procedure.

For a restoration visit, such as getting a cavity filled, tell the dentist if your child tends to be stubborn, defiant, anxious, or fearful in other situations.

Watch how your child reacts. Many parents can guess how their child will respond and should tell the dentist. Certain behaviours may be normal and be linked to your child's age:

- 10 to 24 months. Some securely attached children may get upset when a stranger gets too close or when laying down on their backs.
- 2 to 3 years. A securely attached child may be able to cope with a brief separation from parents but will still look at you for reassurance. In a 2-year-old, "no" may be a common response.
- 3 years. Three-year-olds may not be OK being apart from a parent when having a dental procedure such as getting a cavity filled. This is because most 3-year-olds are not socially mature enough to separate from parents. For all dental procedures EXCEPT DURING GENERAL ANESTHESIA, we encourage one parent to come into the treatment area, to provide support to the child if needed.
- 4 years. Most children should be able to sit in another room from parents for exams and treatment procedures, but one parent is always allowed EXCEPT DURING GENERAL ANESTHESIA.



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THE FIRST VISIT

Your child's first dental visit is to help your child feel comfortable with the dentist. The first dental visit is recommended by 12 months of age, or within 6 months of the first tooth coming in. The first visit often lasts 30 to 45 minutes.

Depending on your child's age, the visit may include a full exam of the teeth, jaws, bite, gums, and oral tissues to check growth and development. If needed, your child may also have a gentle cleaning. This includes polishing teeth and removing any plaque, tartar, and stains.

The pediatric dentist may show you and your child proper home cleaning such as brushing, flossing and advise you on the need for fluoride.

Dental X-rays (radiographs) are images of your teeth that your dentist uses to evaluate your oral health. X-rays aren't often done. But your child's dentist may recommend X-rays to diagnose decay, depending on your child's age. X-rays are also used to see if the root of a jammed baby tooth may be affecting an adult tooth; if there is missing or extra teeth.

In general, dental X-rays are not given unless absolutely needed.



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THE SECOND VISIT

Just like adults, children should see the dentist every 6 months. Some dentists may schedule visits more often, such as every 3 months. This can build comfort and confidence in the child. More frequent visits can also help keep an eye on a development problem.

Protect your children's teeth at home

Here are some tips to protect your children's teeth:

- Before teeth come in, clean gums with a clean, damp cloth.
- Start brushing with a small, soft-bristled toothbrush and a very small amount of toothpaste (the size of a grain of rice) when your child's first tooth appears. Use a pea-sized dab of fluoridated toothpaste after 3 years of age. This is when the child is old enough to spit out the toothpaste after brushing.
- Prevent baby bottle tooth decay. Don't give children a bottle of milk, juice, or sweetened liquid at bedtime or when put down to nap.
- Limit the time your child has a bottle. Your child should empty a bottle in 5 to 6 minutes or less.
- Help your child brush his or her own teeth until age 7 or 8. Have the child watch you brush and follow the same brushing pattern to reduce missed spots.
- Limit foods and treats that increase tooth decay. This includes hard or sticky candies, fruit leather, and sweetened drinks and juice. Offer fruit rather than juice. The fiber in fruit tends to scrape the teeth clean. Juice just exposes the teeth to sugar. Think about it as liquid candy!

