

Happy healthy smiles start with daily dental care.

The dental care you provide for your child sets the stage for healthy adult teeth. Knowing what to do on a day to day basis will reap huge benefits for not only your child's happiness and well-being but also for your pocket book. A daily oral care routine for your children prevents decay and helps empower them to make dental health a lifelong priority.

Baby teeth are just as important as adult teeth. They help children speak clearly and eat well. They also help form the jaw and hold space for adult teeth to grow into. Your child will have baby teeth until they are 12-13 years old. Here are some tips to help parents and caregivers keep those tiny teeth bright and healthy.

Avoid transferring bacteria to your child. It is best to avoid putting an object that has been in your mouth into your baby's mouth. Babies are not born with decay-causing bacteria but these bacteria can be transferred from parents or caregivers to baby. Licking a soother, sharing a toothbrush or spoon when testing a child's food are some ways germs can be passed on to your child. Replacing your child's toothbrush every three months also reduces exposure to decay causing bacteria.

Clean your child's teeth every day. Baby teeth are at risk for decay as soon as they appear. Before teeth appear, wipe your baby's gums with a clean, wet cloth once a day, every day. Once teeth appear, brush with a rice-size amount of fluoride toothpaste twice a day, every day. Once all baby teeth are in (about three years old), increase the amount of toothpaste to a pea-size amount. A parent needs to brush their child's teeth until they can write, not print, their own name.

Lift the lip. Once a month, lift the lip to check for white or brown spots on the teeth. These spots are the earliest signs of tooth decay. To learn about Interior Health's Lift the Lip / Fluoride Varnish Program check out our [website \(http://www.interiorhealth.ca/YourHealth/InfantsChildren/Pages/DentalHealth.aspx\)](http://www.interiorhealth.ca/YourHealth/InfantsChildren/Pages/DentalHealth.aspx).

Avoid juice, milk, and sweetened drinks between meals. Give plain water for thirsty children between meals. Frequent sipping on juice, milk, and sweetened drinks throughout the day increases your child's risk for tooth decay. Limit milk and juice to regularly scheduled meal and snack times. When providing juice make sure it is 100% unsweetened. Never put baby to bed with a bottle containing these beverages. Plain water is best.

Pack dentally healthy snacks. Fresh food is best. Give healthy snacks like fresh fruits and vegetables, dairy products, meats, and grains. Sugary or starchy foods that stick to the teeth can increase your child's risk of tooth decay.

Visit your dental professional. The Canadian Dental Association recommends the first visit to be six months after the first tooth appears, usually by one year of age. Talk to your dentist about applying sealants to the first permanent molars to prevent tooth decay. Regular checkups keep teeth healthy and cost less than treating dental problems.

To find a public health dental service nearest you:

http://www.interiorhealth.ca/FindUs/_layouts/FindUs/info.aspx?type=Service&loc=&svc=Dental%20Health%20Services&ploc=

For more information on dental health:

Infants and children: <http://www.interiorhealth.ca/YourHealth/InfantsChildren/Pages/DentalHealth.aspx>

School-age children: <http://www.interiorhealth.ca/YourHealth/ChildrenYouth/Pages/DentalHealth.aspx>

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