Keeping Your Baby Healthy

Teeth

*Your child’s teeth and gums are very important*

Teeth are needed for chewing, talking and smiling. Baby teeth need to stay healthy even though they will be lost; they hold space for straight and healthy permanent teeth.

*Tooth decay is a common problem, even for babies!*

- If your child has tooth decay, she may:
  - Cry for long hours
  - Have painful toothaches
  - Have a poor appetite and a hard time chewing
  - Have trouble speaking
  - Get black teeth

*Give your child a variety of foods from all the food groups*

- Offer your child healthy snacks like fruits, vegetables, cheese, yogurt and unsweetened cereal
- Sweet foods like candies, cake, cookies, pastries, gelation, donuts and baby desserts are OK once in a while, but not every day.

*When your child is thirsty, offer water*

- Once small serving of juice a day is enough
- Sweet drinks like soda and Kool Aid are OK once in a while but not every day

Brush your child’s teeth after s/he eats foods that stick to the teeth like crackers, peanut butter and soft bread. If foods with sugar remain on your baby’s teeth, tooth decay is more likely to occur.

*Most babies get their first teeth at around 6 months, but it is a good idea to protect your baby from the start.*

- Breastfeed your baby
- Put your baby to sleep without a bottle
- Begin giving your baby a cup around 6 months of age
- Take care of your own teeth

*Wipe or brush your baby’s gums and teeth every day, especially after eating*

- Use a clean washcloth or a moist, soft child’s toothbrush
- Do not use toothpaste

*When your baby is 6 months old*

- Let your baby drink from a cup
- Don’t let your baby use a bottle after 12 months
Check your baby’s teeth and gums for early tooth decay
- Lay your baby’s head on your lap and lift the upper lip
- Look at the front and back of your baby’s teeth
- Look for white, brown or black spots on their teeth
- Check the gums for swelling, bleeding and pimples
- If you see any spots, take your baby to the dentist right away

Protect your baby’s teeth from 1 to 2 years old
- Stop bottle feeding, use training cups
- Give your baby healthy snacks between meals, not sweet ones
- When your child is thirsty, offer water
- Clean your baby’s gums and teeth with a washcloth or soft toothbrush without toothpaste
- Check every week for early signs of tooth decay
- If you see any white, brown or black spots, take your child to the dentist right away
- Take your child to the dentist at least once a year

When your child is 2 to 3 years old
- Brush your child’s teeth twice a day, especially before bed time
- Ask your dentist about fluoride toothpaste when your child is about 2 years old
- Use a pea sized amount of toothpaste
- Teach your child to spit out the toothpaste after brushing
- Don’t let your child swallow or eat toothpaste
- Start teaching your child to brush his or her teeth but remember you still need to help
- Take your child to the dentist at least once a year

Protect your child’s teeth as s/he grows older
- Help your child brush twice a day, especially before bedtime, using fluoride toothpaste
- Floss his or her teeth every day
- Take your child to the dentist at least once a year

Protect your child’s teeth with fluoride
- Fluoride will help make your child’s teeth strong and prevent tooth decay
- Ask your dentist about giving your child fluoride drops or tablets if your water is not fluoridated