

Beyond the Baby Years

Dental Care Basics
for Toddlers and Preschoolers

Healthy teeth are a part of your baby's overall health. Starting your baby or toddler on healthy foods and healthy eating habits is essential. So is daily oral care. Visually checking your baby's teeth is also important. This should be done frequently by you and at least annually by a dentist or doctor trained in infant and toddler oral screening.



"I thought I was giving my child healthy snacks because they weren't 'sugary.' But then I learned that even crackers or fruit snacks can cause cavities, especially when my child munches on them all afternoon."

– Meagan, Walla Walla, WA

Your Toddler's Oral Health

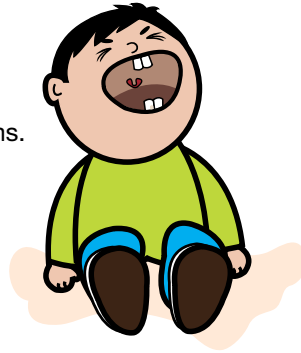
Brushing and flossing

- Brush your child's teeth at least twice a day. Always brush at bedtime.
- Brush soon after your child has a high-carbohydrate, sweet or sticky snack or drink (including juice). If brushing is not possible, rinse his mouth with water.
- Use a small soft toothbrush and a smear (a rice-sized amount) of fluoridated toothpaste.
- Brush for at least two minutes, brushing in tiny circles. Brush every surface of every tooth and the tongue.
- Each family member should have his or her own toothbrush.
- Replace your child's toothbrush every three to four months.
- Get your child involved in the brushing process. It will make things easier when he starts brushing his own teeth.
- Around age 4 or 5, your child will be ready to practice brushing her own teeth. **Children still need your help brushing until they are 8 years old or until they can tie their shoes.**
- When the sides of your child's teeth touch, floss at least once a day to remove small pieces of food stuck between teeth.



Visual check: lift the lip and look

- Keep in tune with your child's mouth. Teeth can change quickly. At least every month, lift your child's lip and take a close look at the teeth and gums.
- Tooth decay often starts along the front or back side of the front teeth or along the gums. The first sign of early decay is a white spot. If you notice white or brown spots on the teeth or see anything unusual, contact your baby's dentist or doctor. He or she may be able to stop and reverse early decay by applying fluoride varnish.



Oral health screenings

Take your child for an oral health check-up at least once a year. Check with your child's doctor to see if early oral screenings can be provided as part of a well-baby check-up. If you need to find a dentist, visit www.DeltaDentalWa.com/BabyTeeth.

Healthy food and good eating habits are key to a healthy mouth. When your child is ready to begin eating solid foods, make healthy choices.

Smart Snacking for Healthy Teeth



Snacking

- Provide healthy snacks such as cheese, fruits and vegetables. Avoid juice, soda, candy and high-carbohydrate snacks such as crackers, sticky fruit rolls and pretzels. These foods feed the germs that can cause cavities.
- When your child has a sweet or high-carbohydrate snack, brush her teeth afterward. If brushing is not possible, rinse her mouth with water.
- Teeth need time to rest and repair themselves. Limit how often your child has juice, sweet drinks and high-carbohydrate snacks. Constant snacking on sticky foods or sipping sweet drinks throughout the day can cause tooth decay.

Bottles and Sippy Cups

- Avoid constant use of a sippy cup, unless it is filled with water.
- If your child uses a bottle at naps or bedtime, fill it with water only.
- Wean your child from a bottle at 12-18 months.

Thumb Sucking and Pacifier Use



Thumb and finger sucking and pacifier use decrease with age. The majority of toddlers discontinue this by the time they are 2-4 years old. If the behavior continues beyond 4 years, there is a risk of an over-bite. Talk to your dentist or your baby's doctor if you have concerns.