



Your Child's Dental Health - What Every Parent Should Know

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Your Child's Dental Health

Q & A with MomSpace and Dr. Gene Sherman

Q: After how many teeth arrive should parents see a dentist?

A: Generally, parents should take their children to the dentist by his/her first birthday or by the time the first tooth comes in. It is extremely important to a child's emotional development toward dentistry to experience simple preventive visits early, so children accept this as the norm. Preventive visits leave a child with an impression preferred to that of a visit to correct a dental problem.

Taking care of baby teeth is especially critical. Not only do healthy teeth help children speak and chew properly, but if baby teeth fall out or decay, they have a substantial impact on permanent teeth, sometimes causing them to come in crooked or crowded or even discolored and mal-formed.

Q: What should occur at that first dental visit?

A: Barring any existing dental problems, the dentist will check the child's gums and teeth for any abnormalities and will look at the child's total oral development. Depending on the age and child's oral condition at this first visit, a simple tooth cleaning (polishing) and topical fluoride treatment may be provided. If necessary, a few small dental x-rays might also be needed. After evaluation and discussion with the child's parents or care givers, the dentist and staff will discuss setting up future visits and help parents understand when and how often they should bring their children in for check-ups.

Q: What type of dental care is appropriate for a baby?

A: Parents should begin gently clean their child's gums with a soft cloth and water soon after birth to prepare the infant for tooth cleansing once teeth emerge. A baby's teeth should be cleansed with a soft brush or wet cloth that contains only a light "smear" of toothpaste. Remember, it is preferable not to swallow toothpaste. In addition, children should visit the dentist as soon as they have their first tooth.

Q: Is there special toothpaste for kids or is adult toothpaste ok?

A: Until age 3, children should use either a lower fluoride (1,000 parts per million) or only a smear of toothpaste on the brush or cloth. Parents should only give them a small amount of toothpaste, generally the size of a pea.

Q: Should anything other than brushing the teeth be done for young kids?

A: Parents may begin to floss once a child has several teeth touching. The parents should do this gently, as flossing too hard can cut the gums.

Q: What should be done at regular check-ups?

A: A typical dental check-up visit depends upon a child's age and the discretion of the dentist. At a minimum, it should consist of an examination and evaluation of the child's oral health and development followed by a discussion with the child's parents or care givers. The exam and evaluation may or may not require a few x-ray "pictures" and most likely accompanied by a simple cleaning (tooth polishing) and topical fluoride application to the teeth. Regular check-ups should occur every six months or at any other time interval considered appropriate by the dentist.

Dr. Gene Sherman, Senior Vice President at AlwaysCare Benefits (a Starmount Life Insurance Company), joined the dental benefits industry 15 years ago after working more than 17 years in private dental practice.