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Dental Care through the Ages

From birth through old age, good oral hygiene should be a priority. Your dental needs evolve over time, but the necessity to keep your teeth healthy across the lifespan stays the same. This e-book will guide you through the stages so you know what to expect (and how to properly care for you and your loved ones' teeth) at each age.




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Babies

Taking your baby to the dentist may not be top-of-mind with the many other appointments that come along with infancy. However, the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD) recommends that babies see a dentist shortly after they cut their first tooth.

**(This usually happens between
six months and one year.)**

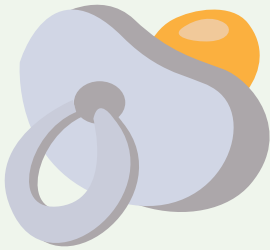
From birth until the first tooth arrives.

To start off on the right foot with oral care, you can rub a soft cloth over your baby's mouth and gums. Using an infant toothbrush at bath time and after each feeding also works.

Once the teeth come in.

You can purchase toothbrushes designed for tiny mouths. Gently brush the teeth at least twice a day.

You don't need to use **toothpaste** at this point.



Pacifier slurping and thumb sucking.

If your baby is comforted by sucking his/her thumb, try to encourage a pacifier instead. The pacifier is an easier habit to break at an early age. And, it reduces the chance of developing crowded, crooked teeth or bite problems. Never dip a pacifier in anything sweet; it's bad for the teeth.

Nap and bedtime bottles.

Some children like the security of a bottle when they lie down for sleep. If you allow them to have a bottle, only give them water. **No formula. No milk. No juice.** All of these sugary liquids can coat the teeth and cause decay.



Preschoolers

Brushing. In the morning and before bed, help brush your preschooler's teeth. You can purchase a toothbrush made for small hands and encourage your child to help you brush so they get used to it. And, you should supervise brushing for school-age children until age 7 or 8.

Toothpaste. Be careful with fluoride toothpaste for children age 3 years and younger. Swallowing fluoride toothpaste can cause tooth enamel defects. You can get fluoride-free "**toddler toothpaste**" at the store or put a pea-sized dab of **kids' toothpaste** on the brush. If you go with the latter, show your child how to spit out the toothpaste afterward.

Flossing. You can start flossing baby teeth when they're all in—usually by age 2.



First dentist visit. A good way to prepare preschoolers is to order a book about the **first visit to the dentist**. It can help them visualize what will happen and build confidence that it won't be scary. Focus on the positives of going to the dentist—that the dentist will make sure their teeth stay bright and healthy.



School-Age Children

Brushing. After age 7 or 8, children will no longer need supervision. A couple of ways to make sure they are brushing long and thoroughly enough is to:

1. Tell them to sing “Happy Birthday” twice in their heads.
2. Get a **toothbrush with lights** that tell them when to stop.

Flossing. Children should floss daily. Help them out until around age 10.

Regular cleanings. Twice yearly dental check-ups remove plaque and bacteria that can cause tooth decay and other oral health problems. And, these problems can follow children into adulthood. Poor oral health is a known link to poor overall health—including heart disease and diabetes. Start them young on good habits.

Fluoride. Most of us have access to fluoridated water. But, if you don't in your area, talk with your dentist about other ways your child can get fluoride. Supplements, treatments, toothpastes and mouth rinses are available.

Sealants. Having children's back teeth sealed can help lower the risk of decay for quite some time. When four out of five cavities in kids younger than 12 years old are on the chewing surfaces of back teeth, this is probably a good treatment to have.



Snacks. Try to limit kids' snacking as much as possible—especially sugary snacks that are bad for their teeth. Encourage fresh fruits and vegetables, yogurt, cheese, air-popped popcorn.

Mouth guards for sports. No matter what, they must wear them, especially for contact sports. It's a habit they must learn as young athletes and continue into the teen years to protect their pearly whites.



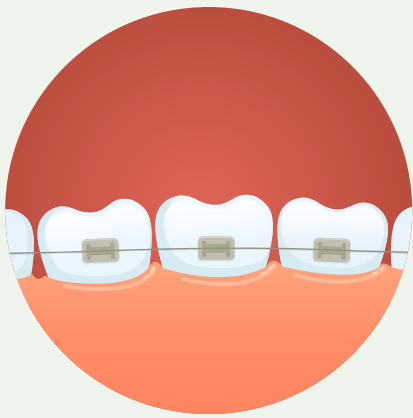
Teens

Daily maintenance. Same as when they were kids, teens need to brush in the morning and before bed with fluoride toothpaste. They should also floss daily. They'll likely try to be lazy about both, but make sure you're aware if they're slacking.

Go to the dentist.

Twice a year appointments to make sure everything looks good.

What they eat. Teens are hungry. All the time. The average teen eats **NINE** times a day! It's naïve to think your teens will eat only healthy snacks, but keep an eye on their snacking habits. Tooth decay and gum disease rates go up during the teenage years. The conditions affect 60 percent of teens, in part because of the sugary and starchy foods they snack on.



Orthodontia. Many teens require braces and other orthodontic procedures for a variety of reasons. Some kids' teeth grow in crooked or overlapping. Some grow in rotated or twisted. Small mouths can cause teeth to crowd and shift into crooked positions. And sometimes jaws don't align, causing an overbite or underbite. Once an orthodontist diagnoses the problem, he/she can decide on the treatment that's right for your teen.

Mouth piercings. Tongue, lip and cheek piercings are a no-no. Not only can they can become infected (**painful!**), but they can chip or crack teeth or damage soft tissue in the mouth. Do what you can to discourage it!



Adults

Proper oral hygiene. Brush twice a day with fluoride toothpaste to remove plaque and keep tooth decay at bay. Floss daily to remove plaque from between your teeth that your toothbrush can't reach.



Diet. What goes for your kids goes for you, too! To protect your teeth, limit or avoid sugary and starchy foods, especially sticky snacks that stay on the teeth and produce plaque. Proper nutrition is important for your overall health, and is also necessary for healthy teeth and gums. Eating a well-balanced diet keeps your gums and teeth healthy with nutrients and minerals they need to fight off gum disease and other oral health issues.

Regular professional cleanings and checkups.

Even if you brush and floss regularly, certain oral health issues can crop up in adulthood. That's why it's so important to stick to your regular annual checkups with your dentist. He or she can address any oral health problems and recommend treatments and a course of action to prevent further complications.

Gum disease. Poor oral hygiene in adulthood can lead to gum disease. It begins as gingivitis, which is treatable and reversible in this early stage.

Symptoms include **red, swollen or tender gums that may bleed when you brush or floss.**

Visit your dentist before serious problems develop. Advanced stages of gum disease may lead to tooth loss or other major oral health problems.

In addition, studies show that your oral health affects your overall health. Poor oral hygiene puts you at risk for chronic diseases and health complications, such as diabetes, heart disease and premature birth. Preventing gum disease can be simple. Brush twice a day, floss every day and schedule regular cleanings every six months.

Gum sensitivity. That uncomfortable “zing” you sometimes feel on your gums can be an increasing problem through adulthood. Gum recession happens naturally over time. The exposed area of the tooth can be painful from cold or hot foods or beverages, or even cold air. Anti-sensitivity toothpaste can help, but if the problem persists, consult your dentist. You may be referred to an oral surgeon who can go over treatment options.

Crowns/implants/bridges. Many adults many require crowns, implants or bridges to strengthen damaged or lost teeth. Crowns cover or “cap” a damaged tooth entirely to restore its shape, size and strength, and improve its appearance. It protects a weak tooth from breaking or holds parts of a cracked tooth together.

If you’ve lost a tooth due to tooth decay, dental implants may be the answer. Placed in the jaw bone, they provide a strong foundation for permanent or removable replacement teeth. These teeth are made to match your natural teeth. Dental implants look and feel like your real teeth, which can help improve your confidence. They’re durable and last many years.

Bridges are also used to replace one or more missing teeth. A bridge is made up of either natural teeth or two crowns. These anchoring teeth are on either side of the missing tooth. A false tooth is placed between the anchoring teeth.

(Consult with your dentist to see which options are right for you.)



Older Adults

Advancing age increases seniors' risk for a number of oral health problems. It's very important to keep up your good oral hygiene habits, particularly to keep away chronic conditions that could be detrimental to your health.

Daily brushing and flossing. Taking care of your natural teeth is crucial at this point in your life. Don't cut corners on brushing and flossing. Brush at least twice a day with toothpaste containing fluoride and floss at least once a day.

(Also, visit your dentist on a regular schedule for cleaning and an oral exam.)

Gum disease: chronic conditions and dementia.

Fighting gum disease can be an uphill battle in older adulthood. It's caused by plaque and made worse by:

- Food stuck in teeth
- Tobacco use
- Poor-fitting bridges and dentures
- Unhealthy diets
- Diseases such as anemia, cancer and diabetes

Gum disease is also the leading cause of tooth loss in older adults, as well as chronic conditions and complications such as heart disease, stroke and diabetes. And, recent studies link poor oral hygiene to Alzheimer's disease and dementia. In fact, one study pinpointed gum disease bacteria in the brain. Work with your dentist to keep gum disease at bay. It's important for your overall health.

Root decay. Tooth roots become exposed due to gum recession. The roots become decayed because they're not protected from decay-causing acids.

Darkened teeth. Years of drinking coffee, tea, cola or red wine or stain-causing foods can discolor your teeth. Dentin—the bone-like tissue underneath the tooth enamel—darkens and tarnishes your teeth's bright glow. If you find you're self-conscious about it, talk with your dentist. He or she can recommend whitening options based on the strength and condition of your teeth.

Practicing good dental health across the lifespan is important to maintaining a healthy mouth, teeth and gums. It will also improve your quality of life.



Remember:
taking care of your oral health is an investment in your overall health.

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