



# A Healthy Smile for Your Young Child

## Tips to Keep Your Child Healthy

Taking care of your young child's teeth and gums is important. Brush your child's teeth, give your child healthy foods, and take your child to the dentist. If you take care of your teeth, it will help your child's teeth stay healthy, too.

Children need healthy teeth. Healthy teeth help them to chew and to speak clearly. Baby teeth also make space for adult teeth. Young children want to brush their own teeth, but they need help. Until your child is about 7 or 8, you should brush her teeth.

Give your child a healthy start! Here are tips to keep your child's teeth and gums healthy.

## Take Care of Your Child's Mouth

- Brush your child's teeth with toothpaste with fluoride (floor-ide) twice a day, after breakfast and before bed. Use a soft toothbrush made for young children.
- For children under age 3, use a small smear of toothpaste. For children ages 3 to 6, use toothpaste the size of a pea.



*Smear*



*Pea-size*

- Brush the front and back of your child's teeth. Lift his lips to brush at the gum line of his front teeth.
- Make sure your child spits out the toothpaste after brushing. Do not have your child rinse with

water. The toothpaste that stays in your child's mouth is good for his teeth.

- Floss your child's teeth if they touch each other. Ask dental office staff for help.
- If your child has sore gums from a tooth coming in, give him a cold teething ring, cool spoon, or cold wet washcloth. Or you can rub your child's gums with a clean finger.
- Germs can pass from your mouth to your child's mouth. Use a different spoon to taste your child's food. If your child's pacifier falls on the floor, clean it with water.
- Do not dip pacifiers in sweet foods like sugar, honey, or syrup.

## Give Your Child Healthy Foods

- Give your child healthy foods. Give her foods like fruits, vegetables, whole-grain products like bread or crackers, and dairy products like milk, yogurt, or cheese. Lean meats, fish, chicken, eggs, and beans are also good for your child.
- Wean your child from a bottle to a cup by age 12 to 14 months.
- Do not put your child to sleep with a bottle filled with milk, juice, or sugary drinks like fruit-flavored drinks or pop (soda).





- Serve juice in a cup with no lid, not a bottle. For children ages 1 to 3, offer no more than 4 ounces of juice each day. For children ages 4 to 6, offer no more than 4 to 6 ounces of juice each day. Give your child 100-percent fruit juice only. It is even better to give your child fruit instead of juice.
- Give your child water several times a day. The water should have fluoride.
- Give your child fewer sweets like candy, cookies, or cake. And give your child fewer sugary drinks. If you give your child sweets or sugary drinks, give them at mealtimes only.
- Reward your child with a big smile or a hug, not with food.

## Get Dental Care for Your Child

- Check your child's teeth and gums once a month. Look for white spots. If you see white spots, take your child to a dentist right away.
- If your child has not been to the dentist, make an appointment.
- Continue to visit the dentist to have your child's teeth and gums checked. The dentist will tell you when you need to come back.

## Keep Your Own Mouth Healthy

- Brush your teeth with a soft toothbrush and toothpaste with fluoride, twice a day, after breakfast and before bed.
- Floss once a day before bedtime.



- Eat healthy foods, like whole-grain products, dairy products, fruits, vegetables, meat, fish, chicken, eggs, beans, and nuts.
- Eat fewer sweets like candy, cookies, or cake. Drink fewer sugary drinks like fruit-flavored drinks or pop (soda). Eat sweets or drink sugary drinks at mealtimes only.
- Get dental care.

## Resources

### Finding a Dentist

- <http://www.aapd.org/finddentist>
- <http://www.ada.org/ada/findadentist/advancedsearch.aspx>
- <http://www.knowyourteeth.com/findadentist>

### Finding Low-Cost Dental Care

- <http://www.nidcr.nih.gov/FindingDentalCare/ReducedCost/FLCDC.htm>

### Finding Dental Insurance Coverage

- <https://www.insurekidsnow.gov>

---

Cite as: Holt K, Barzel R. 2014. *A Healthy Smile for Your Young Child: Tips to Keep Your Child Healthy* (rev.). Washington, DC: National Maternal and Child Oral Health Resource Center.

*A Healthy Smile for Your Young Child: Tips to Keep Your Child Healthy* (rev.)  
© 2014 by the National Maternal and Child Oral Health Resource Center, Georgetown University.

This publication was made possible by grant number H47MC00048 from the Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB), Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). Permission is given to photocopy this publication or to forward it, in its entirety, to others. Requests for permission to use all or part of the information contained in this publication in other ways should be sent to the address below.

National Maternal and Child Oral Health Resource Center  
Georgetown University  
Phone: (202) 784-9771  
E-mail: [OHRCinfo@georgetown.edu](mailto:OHRCinfo@georgetown.edu)  
Website: <http://www.mchoralhealth.org>

