

Parent/Caregiver Education

Below are examples of anticipatory guidance for parents and caregivers. Oral health education should be integrated as part of comprehensive counseling with parents/caregivers during well-child visits. This education should include information about diet, oral hygiene, fluoride, and referral to a dental home.

Anticipatory Guidance for Parents and Caregivers¹

Infant & Children: Ages 6-months to 9 Years

- Before your baby has teeth, clean their mouth with a washcloth every day.
- As soon as your baby has teeth, brush 2 times daily with a rice-sized smear of toothpaste that has fluoride for ages 0-2. Use a pea sized smear for ages 3-5.
- Allow children to practice brushing their own teeth but know they still need help to be effective until ages 8.
- Flossing between teeth is necessary. Encourage children to start early to set a healthy habit.
- Milk, formula, juices, soda, and breast milk all have sugar in them that can puddle around a sleeping baby's teeth and cause decay.
- Limit their exposure to sugars, including fruit juice, and only use water at bedtime.
- Germs that can cause cavities can be transferred from adults to babies, so don't share anything with your baby that can transmit germs. For example, don't share your spoon.
- Dental checks should occur by age 1 with your dentist or medical doctor.
- Play your part in the prevention of cavities by looking at your child's teeth for signs of decay. Encourage brushing and flossing.
- Ask your doctor about fluoride varnish and water testing for fluoride content.

Adolescents: Ages 10-18 Years

- Brush twice a day with toothpaste that has fluoride.
- Floss once a day and use a mouth rinse with fluoride that has been recommended by your dentist/hygienist.
- Get sealants on the permanent molars -(molars erupt around age 6 and 12) check with your school to see if you have a school oral health program that will do this. If not ask your dentist or independent dental hygienist
- Wisdom teeth (3rd molars)-may erupt between the ages of 17-21. Often there is not enough room, and they are impacted. Don't delay treatment, this can be damaging to surrounding teeth and very painful.
- Eating Disorders can harm your oral health. Without proper nutrition, you may experience bleeding gums, dry mouth, erosion of the enamel, fractured enamel, and change of tooth color.
- Smoking/vaping can cause the following:
 - Stained tongue and teeth which may lead to cosmetic difficulties
 - Gum disease or tooth loss
 - Oral cancer

¹ Healthy Habits for Happy Smiles, <https://headstart.gov/browse/series/healthy-habits-happy-smiles>

Adult Dental Care

When performing daily oral hygiene (brushing 2x/day, flossing daily), consider the following:

- Don't forget to clean your tongue too! Tongue scrapers can be helpful.
- If you have increased risk of gum disease, consider mouth rinse or toothpaste that says antibacterial on the label.
- If you have an increased risk of cavities, consider mouth rinse with fluoride.
- For patients that struggle to clean between their teeth, consider what interdental cleaning tool might be best. Some examples are interdental brushes, piks, or a waterpik.
- If you want or need improved plaque removal, consider a power toothbrush.

Other special considerations:

- Avoid tobacco products.
- Eat healthy foods and have fewer sugary snacks, acidic and carbonated drinks.
- Visit your dental provider regularly. Every 6 months is recommended for most adults, but you may need more frequent visits.
- Discuss any medications you are taking with your dentist and primary care provider. Many medications have oral side effects including dry mouth, which can lead to cavities.

WARNING SIGNS OF POOR ORAL HEALTH

- Red, swollen, tender or bleeding gums
- Bad breath that won't go away
- Loose teeth
- Sensitive or sore teeth or gums
- Receding gums (gums that pull away from the teeth)
- Dry mouth
- Long-lasting mouth sores