

## 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 Caregivers<sup>1</sup>

#### 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

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<sup>1</sup> 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