

Healthy teeth start early

Do you know the most common chronic disease that faces young children today?

It's not asthma or hay fever. It's actually cavities in children's teeth, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Fortunately, this common health problem can be corrected if it's caught early enough and good habits are taught from a young age.

CRITICAL TO HEALTH

For children, cavities are about more than mouth pain. They can distract students from learning or keep them home from school, which can have a big impact on their educational goals. It's tough for a child to "be himself" when he is distracted by tooth pain, after all.

To keep your child's teeth in tip-top shape, experts recommend they see a dentist for a checkup by their first birthday, or shortly after their first teeth appear. That's an early visit — and one too many parents skip — but it can help catch oral health problems quickly and also set the stage for a lifetime of healthy teeth.

GOOD HABITS

One of the most impor-

tant aspects of good oral health is maintaining good habits, and that's especially true for children.

It's another reason why regular dental visits are so important for young people.

When children go to the dentist, they're not only getting work done on their teeth. They're also learning lessons about oral hygiene that can last a lifetime.

Ideally, you'll want to find a dentist who is good at teaching children how to take care of their teeth properly. If the dentist can make it fun for the child — and show them how important it is to take care of their oral health — they'll be much better off later in life.

After all, the habits they pick up now will

likely stick with them for a long time.

BABY TEETH

Some parents may wonder why they need to pay so much attention to their children's baby teeth when they won't last through adulthood anyway. But the

truth is that the health of their gums and teeth as children can impact their smile as an adult.

Experts at the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry say that baby teeth play three big roles:

— Maintaining good nutrition by permitting your child to chew properly.

— Play a part in speech development.

— Help the permanent teeth by saving space for them.

In the end, having healthy teeth is also an important part of having a healthy body. They will help your child eat right, learn to speak and smile with confidence.



Four steps to oral health

Good oral hygiene is the key to a happy, healthy mouth. The American Dental Association (ADA) recommends these four steps to keep your teeth and gums clean:

1. BRUSH OFTEN.

You should brush your teeth at least twice a day — morning and night — to keep your teeth clean. But just as important as the schedule is the quality of the dental products you use.

Make sure you're using a fluoride toothpaste that is accepted by the ADA.

You should also frequently check your toothbrush for signs of wear. To do its job properly, a toothbrush should be replaced every three to four months, and even sooner if you can tell that the bristles are starting to fray.

2. FLOSS DAILY.

Everyone should floss their teeth — or use some other kind of interdental cleaner — once per day.

Even if you brush your teeth regularly, there are places your toothbrush can't reach. Dental floss can reach the tight spaces between teeth and at the gums — places where germs love to hide.

This will help remove plaque from your teeth and eliminate the bacteria and food particles that can cause tooth decay over time.

3. EAT RIGHT.

Your diet has a big impact on the health of your teeth. Even if you brush and floss regularly, eating the wrong foods — or even at the wrong times — can lead to tooth decay if you're not careful.

The ADA recommends limiting your snacks between meals and eating a balanced diet to avoid tooth problems.

Snacking between meals, especially if they're sugary snacks, should be avoided because they allow sugar to linger on your teeth longer than if you ate and drank an entire balanced meal.

Foods that are high in sugar content should also be avoided. Not only is it bad for your body, but it also provides the fuel that helps bacteria to grow on your teeth and break down the surface over time.

4. SEE THE DENTIST.

Perhaps no other step is more important to oral health than regular trips to the dentist.

Regularly scheduled dental checkups — involving cleaning, a professional examination and often X-rays — are a great way to catch minor dental problems before they develop into something major.

That means regular checkups can actually save you money by catching issues in their early stages, when they are typically easier and cheaper to fix.

Even if you think your teeth are in great shape, it's still a good idea to visit the dentist regularly for checkups. It's the only way to catch many oral health problems before they become serious.



Service beyond the smile

HAVE A PROBLEM? LET YOUR DENTIST HELP

Your local dentist can do a lot more than clean your teeth. Today's dental practices can help you with a wide range of oral health problems, letting you protect your teeth for years to come.

Here's a look at five common problems dentists can help resolve:

GRINDING TEETH

Many people develop a habit of grinding their teeth when they experience stress. It's a common issue and, given today's busy world, one that seems to be increasingly problematic.

Teeth grinding, which usually occurs during sleep, can lead to a long list of dental problems, including crooked, loose or fractured teeth and an abnormal bite. It can sometimes lead to sore jaws and a dull headache, too.

Your dentist is trained to give you options for dealing with grinding teeth that can help keep your smile protected.

CANKER SORES

Sores in your mouth can have all kinds of causes, from sharp objects in your mouth to bacteria or jagged edges on your teeth.

Whatever the cause, it is important to have a dentist diagnose frequent canker sores because, at best, they make your mouth very uncomfortable. At worst, they could be the sign of a serious disease.

While sores will often heal on their own, your dentist may be able to prescribe antiviral drugs, antibiotics, oral bandages or other treatments depending on your situation.

BAD BREATH

Bad breath, also called halitosis, can be an embarrassing condition — and you might not even be aware it's occurring.

Halitosis has a variety of

causes, ranging from dry mouth to dieting or simply eating too many onions and garlic. Whatever the cause, dentists can help you track it down and find a solution that's effective for you.



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WHITENING

It seems that everywhere we look, there are pictures of perfect, bright smiles. For people with discolored teeth, it can be a source of embarrassment or cause a loss in confidence, which is why teeth whitening procedures are so popular in many dental offices.

Depending on the cause and extent of the discoloration in your teeth, dentists can recommend treatments that will improve your smile. They range from in-office bleaching to at-home bleaching and special toothpaste that can whiten your grin.

MOUTH GUARDS

Playing sports can be dangerous, but you can offer your teeth some protection with a properly fitting mouth guard that you get from a dentist.

You can certainly buy pre-made mouth guards from sports shops, but these rarely fit properly because everyone's teeth are arranged differently. A better bet, especially if you spend a lot of time playing sports that risk dental injury, is to get a custom-fit guard.