

SELF-PACED LESSON

After reading this lesson, click the survey link at the end to answer a few questions and receive nutrition education credit for your class.

# Keeping Your Child's Teeth Healthy



**A healthy smile starts now!**

## Why is Preventing Tooth Decay in Baby Teeth Important?

Although baby teeth fall out, it is important to keep them healthy until the permanent (adult) teeth are ready to come in and replace them. Baby teeth are important to your child's overall health. A child's ability to chew, speak, play, and learn depends on having a healthy mouth and teeth. A child will not be able to concentrate with a toothache.

**Other Reasons:** Baby teeth keep the space needed for the permanent teeth to grow into the jaws. When baby teeth are lost too soon, crowding of the teeth may occur, and your child may need braces.

Tooth decay is contagious. A permanent tooth is more likely to have decay if it comes into the mouth next to a decayed baby tooth.

## How can Tooth Decay be Prevented in Baby Teeth?

### Cleaning and Brushing

- *Start cleaning your baby's mouth during the first few days after the birth.*
- *Gently wipe the gums and mouth with a wet washcloth after breast and bottle feeding.*
- *As soon as the first tooth erupts, begin gently brushing the teeth with a small soft toothbrush.*
- Before the age of 3, brush with a "smear" of fluoridated toothpaste (about the size of a grain of rice) twice a day.
- Between 3 and 6 years of age, brush with a "pea-sized" amount of fluoridated toothpaste twice a day.
- Teach your child to rinse and spit as soon as possible.
- Supervise brushing at least until age 8; let child practice, let adult finish.
- The tooth brush should be the last thing that touches the teeth before bed (not snacks or drinks, other than water).
- Make brushing fun by reading a bedtime story after brushing, and before putting child to bed.



### Limit Sugary Foods and Drinks

- *Never fill bottles with sugary liquids such as milk, sugar water, juice, soda, or sweet tea.*
- Do not give baby a bottle at naptime or bedtime. Do not allow them to carry around a bottle during the day.
- Limit sweets and soda to dessert rather than snacks.
- Soda is a treat and NOT a drink.
- Rinse the mouth out with water after sweet foods and drinks.

### Make Sure Your Child Drinks Fluoridated Water

- Fluoride is the most effective way of preventing tooth decay.
- Fluoride makes teeth stronger.
- Fluoride can repair small cavities.
- Fluoride is safe and natural.

### Bring Your Child to See a Dentist at 12 Months

- *Get it Done in Year One.*
- One dental visit when there is one tooth can equal zero cavities!



**STOP!**

**[Click here](#) to complete the survey and receive credit**



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