

“HOW CAN I INSTILL HEALTHY DENTAL HABITS IN MY YOUNG CHILDREN?”

- ASHA, LINCOLN

the experts weigh in



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Start early. For infants and young children, oral health outcomes are the responsibility of the parent. Growing children will gradually assume more of this responsibility for themselves. In order for this to be a successful transition, key habits must be formed early on. Start cleaning your infant’s gums with a clean damp cloth, or baby finger brush even before teeth arrive. When teeth do arrive, brush their teeth after breakfast and right before bed. Start flossing between your child’s back teeth when they start to touch (~ age 4). Your young child may go through an “independent” stage where they want to brush all by themselves. That’s ok as long as mommy gets her turn afterwards. Remember to use only a small “pea-sized” amount of fluoride toothpaste starting at age 2. By age 7, your child has likely developed the motor skill necessary to brush on their own; make sure you supervise them initially until you’re confident they’re doing it right. Good dietary habits are also vital. Limit snacking and stay away from food choices that contain refined sugar or cooked starch. Lastly, make sure to bring your child in for a first dental visit no later than age 1.



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Dental decay is one of the largest growing diseases in the pediatric population. The sooner you get your child in the habit of cleaning their teeth the easier it will be to set up routines. Start by cleaning your child’s gums with a soft infant toothbrush and water. Next, regular dental visits at least every 6 months after the child’s first birthday helps your child stay cavity-free. Be aware of frequent snacking during the day since that is one of the reasons why kids get cavities in addition to poor hygiene and a high sugar diet. Encourage your child to brush his or her teeth at least twice a day. Due to the limited dexterity of children, I always encourage parents to brush their children’s teeth first and then let them do it afterwards. Supervision of brushing habits is recommended up to the age of nine. Get them in the habit of flossing their teeth at least once a day. Have sealants applied when appropriate and check with your water company to see if the water in your area is fluoridated. Consult with your kid’s dentist about prescription fluoride and other fluoride recommendations. Find a child friendly dental office that both you and your child feel comfortable in and your child is excited about. Prevention is the key to a healthy smile and ultimately life.



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Parental involvement is extremely important in instilling healthy dental habits. Most cavities are due to a diet high in sugary foods and lack of proper brushing.

Listed below are some of the tips for cavity prevention in young children:

1. Help your children brush and floss regularly. Children learn by watching their parents.
2. Choose nutritious snacks ...rely less on processed packaged foods and substitute with fresh fruits and vegetables whenever possible
3. Avoid sticky foods (fruit rolls and sticky dried fruit). Do not bribe or reward your child using candy and other unhealthy food.
4. Avoid high carbohydrate/sugary sports drinks or juices. Most juices are high in sugar and less in nutritional value. Drink water instead.
5. If you live in a community that does not have fluoridated water ask your pediatrician for a supplement.
6. Lastly routine dental care such as 6-month cleanings and examinations can also develop lasting friendships with the dental team.