

ORAL HEALTH MONTH

Dr. Abby Degaust
Ask your dentist

Q: At what age should I bring my child to the dentist?

A: The current recommendation is at age 1 or 6 months after the eruption of the first tooth. The focus of the first visit is on education and prevention.

Dental decay is the most common chronic disease in children. It is recommended to clean your child's mouth even before your child has teeth. You can do this by using a soft baby brush or wrap your finger in a clean damp washcloth and wipe your baby's gums.

Once the first tooth has erupted you can start using toothpaste. It is recommended to use a rice grain sized amount of fluoride toothpaste for children under the age of 3 years old and a green pea sized amount for children over 3 years old. Fluoride is the most important health measure in maintaining oral health.

You should be helping your child brush their teeth until their dexterity is adequate enough to do it on their own. Milestones that can be used to measure dexterity include writing their own name, colouring in the lines, or tying their own shoes. It is ideal to brush your child's teeth two times per day, but the most important time is the nighttime brushing.

Flossing is also very important in preventing dental decay. If the baby teeth are in contact or touching, it is necessary to floss between them because the enamel on baby teeth is very thin at the contact and cavities can progress quickly.

It is fairly well known not to let your child go to bed with a bottle of milk or juice, but the same also applies to formula. Another less well known fact is that unrestricted at will breast-feeding at night may also increase the risk of tooth decay. Children also shouldn't be sipping sugary drinks all day long. It is recommended to have milk or juice at meals and water between meals.

Now what if your child gets a cavity? All too often as dental professionals we hear "oh well, what's the big deal, it's just a baby tooth", but it is a big deal because baby teeth hold the space for the adult teeth. So ideally, we want to fix the baby tooth to hold that space or if we cannot save the tooth and it needs to be extracted a space maintainer appliance may need to be used.



Dr. Abby Degaust (BSc. Biochemistry, DDS) owns the Family Dental Centre in Fredericton, NB and is the president of the Fredericton Dental Society. Her opinions are expressed in this newspaper and are published for education and informational purposes only and are not intended as diagnosis, treatment or as a substitute for professional dental care or advice.

