



TIP SHEET

The Importance of Oral Health



The importance of keeping your child's mouth healthy begins early! The American Dental Association recommends that you visit your child's dentist with the eruption of his/her first tooth and no later than the first birthday. Visiting your child's dentist every six months, or as advised by the dentist, is an important step in good oral health—along with twice daily brushing, flossing and proper nutrition.

Establishing healthy oral habits early in your child's life is important.

- **Children with disabilities may have special oral health needs.** Children with disabilities can be more susceptible to tooth decay, gum disease and oral trauma due to medication requirements, specialized diets, increased sensitivities and physical difficulties. Good oral health habits are the best way to protect against problems.
- **Poor oral health can affect a child's health, growth and speech.** Tooth decay is the most common chronic and infectious disease of American children. Dental disease in infants and toddlers is linked to failure to thrive, speech delays and developmental delays. Poor oral health affects the digestive process and can lead to intestinal failure or Irritable Bowel Syndrome.
- **Good oral health can improve a child's academic and emotional well-being.** Children with chronic dental pain are unable to focus, can be easily distracted and have problems completing schoolwork. Poor oral health has been related to decreased school performance, poor social relationships and less success later in life. On the other hand, a healthy mouth is more attractive, boosting a child's self-esteem and social confidence.
- **Oral health problems can be prevented.** Most dental problems start out small but grow more complex if left untreated. Prevention of dental issues means less extensive and less expensive treatment for your child.
- **Oral health teaches new skills.** Oral health and other self-care activities give children a chance to learn new skills. For example, the simple act of brushing teeth can be a rich opportunity for a child to practice multiple skills, such as using fine-motor muscles, following directions, and reducing tactile defensiveness.
- **Good oral health habits mean that your child will have a healthy smile to share with you!**

Disclaimer: This information is provided for reference only. Consult your dentist before engaging in any procedures, practices, or treatments. You can find many styles of toothbrushes at your local pharmacy or grocery store. You can also find choices from online vendors like www.dentist.net. Remember: keep trying until you find what works best for your child!

These tips were compiled from a variety of sources, including California State Council on Developmental Disabilities and the Anderson Center for Dental Care www.chsd.org, Academy of General Dentistry www.agd.org and American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry www.aapd.org. For more tip sheets, visit www.fraser.org.