

Small Teeth...Big Future

Children's teeth may be small, but they've got a lifetime ahead of them. It's vital to properly care for small teeth right from the start to minimize oral complications that can arise from poor oral hygiene. Being a parent is a busy job, so the College of Dental Hygienists of Ontario (CDHO) has created a Healthy Teeth for Tomorrow tip sheet to help parents better understand what is important when it comes to building healthy teeth.

New Teeth

- The first primary (or 'baby') teeth appear at about six months of age.
- Gently clean newly erupted teeth with a gauze or washcloth.

Sweets and Baby Teeth

- Rinse the infant's mouth after giving any medication, especially if it is sweetened for taste.
- Avoid giving your infant either sweet drinks, such as juice, in their bottle or sweet pacifiers before bedtime. Frequently cited as a cause of cavities in children, this practice increases exposure to cavity-causing carbohydrates. Also avoid milk and formula before bedtime. Use plain water instead.

Visiting the Dental Office

- First birthday = first visit to the dental office. While infants might not have any immediate problems, there's no better time to begin prevention and learn proper care than right from the very beginning.
- Second birthday = first visit with a dental hygienist.

Oral Care for New Teeth

- Be sure to use a soother that has an orthodontic design.
- Begin flossing when most of the baby teeth are in.
- When brushing begins, use a pea-size (or smaller) amount of toothpaste.
- Early exposure to fluoride will help make bones and teeth strong. However, too much fluoride can cause fluorosis, a white to brown mottling or streaking of the permanent teeth in the front of the mouth.

Oral Complications in Children

- Infants and children can suffer from oral infections and cavities.
- Early Childhood Caries (ECC) is a severe form of tooth decay in the primary teeth of infants and toddlers. It affects more than 10 per cent of preschool-age children in Canada. Causes of ECC include the caregiver passing bacteria to the child (e.g. through kisses), the amount of sugars and starches in the diet, and the time and frequency of feedings.
- Toddlers who have ECC tend to remain at a high risk and often develop cavities in their adult teeth.

Adult Teeth

- The shedding of primary (or 'baby') teeth occurs between the ages of 6 and 12.
- Parents or caregivers should assist children as they clean their teeth until the age of 6 to ensure proper cleaning.
- Good oral hygiene care beginning at a young age will form a habit for a lifetime.

Dental Hygienists and the CDHO

A dental hygienist is an important member of the oral health care team. She/he provides professional treatment and advice to help prevent gum disease and dental cavities, as well as to support and promote total wellness.

All practicing dental hygienists are regulated health professionals who have been educated at a recognized university or college. In Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan, dental hygienists are registered with their respective provincial regulatory body. The Colleges are self-regulating organizations that regulate dental hygienists to ensure the public receives safe and effective dental hygiene care. In Ontario, dental hygienists are registered with the College of Dental Hygienists of Ontario (CDHO), which is celebrating 10 years of self-regulation in 2004. Dental hygienists in Manitoba and the Atlantic provinces are governed through dental regulatory bodies but are actively pursuing self-regulation.

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