



Help your Child Smile for Life

Teach your child tips to take good care of his teeth

Your baby's first teeth begin to appear when he is about 6 months old. By the time he is 3 years old, the whole set of 20 baby (or milk) teeth will be fully erupted.

From the age of 6, these will gradually be replaced by adult teeth. Practising proper dental care will help your child keep his adult teeth permanently.

Why looking after my child's teeth is important

Some parents might ask: "Why is it crucial to look after my child's teeth now, since the baby teeth will drop out anyway and they will be replaced by adult teeth?"

Healthy habits start young and will carry over to adulthood. A child who does not want to brush his teeth or go to a dentist will likely continue to do so in adulthood. Not unless parents guide him and instill good health habits from young.

A child with bad teeth might also face the problem of crooked teeth when the adult teeth erupt to take the place of the baby teeth.

It is good to know that a child with a good set of teeth will be able to speak properly and carry off a good self-image, which can boost his self-esteem and confidence.

Consistently guide your child on how to care for his teeth and this healthy habit will stay with him for life.

Daily care

Your child needs to brush his teeth twice a day, once in the morning and once before he sleeps at night. Most young children are not detailed when brushing their teeth. It is crucial to supervise your child when he brushes his teeth till he is 7-9 years old.

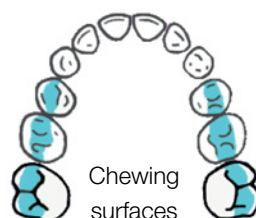
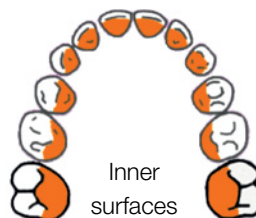
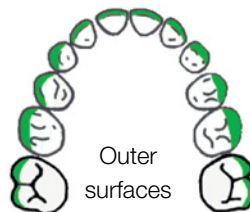
You can make toothbrushing a happy affair every day. Find a way that works for both you and your child. Do try out some of the suggested activities at the end of this chapter to encourage daily toothbrushing.



How to brush your child's teeth

Systematically brush the surfaces of your child's teeth: outer, inner and chewing surfaces.

1. Be systematic
2. Divide the upper and lower jaws into three segments each
3. Brush all surfaces of a tooth



Tools for teeth

The toothbrush section of a supermarket or a pharmacy is a confusing place. There are so many different types of toothbrushes available, how do you choose the right one?

For children, choose a toothbrush with a smaller head and soft bristles. The mouths of children are not as large as those of adults; a smaller-head brush will be able to reach into the back sections better. Soft bristles are gentler on the gums.



Tool tips

• Electric or manual, which is better?

An electric toothbrush can be helpful for children with less manual dexterity, for example, physical handicaps.

• Toothbrush tag

Change toothbrushes every 3-6 months, or when they become frayed. Worn-out toothbrushes do not clean the teeth well, and may injure the gums.

• Toothpaste

If your child has not learnt how to spit yet, have him use fluoride-free toothpaste or children-strength toothpaste.

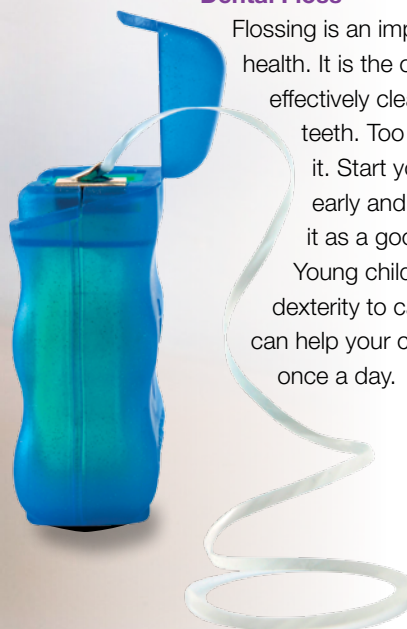
As soon as your child can spit effectively, it is important to introduce adult-strength (1000ppm) toothpaste. Use only a smear of adult-strength toothpaste for children below 6 years of age and change this to a pea-sized amount after they turn 6.



• Dental Floss

Flossing is an important step in dental health. It is the only thing that can effectively clean in-between the teeth. Too many people ignore it. Start your child on this path early and let him develop it as a good lifelong habit.

Young children do not have the dexterity to carry out flossing. You can help your child floss his teeth once a day.



Why does your child need regular dental check-ups?

Many parents think that children do not need to visit the dentist, but you are encouraged to arrange regular dental check-ups for your child from his first birthday. Your child needs to see the dentist by age 2 or 3, when all the baby teeth have erupted.

Your child could have a dental problem even if he does not have any symptoms, and this could eventually lead to pain and swelling that will affect eating, speaking and even sleeping. A visit to the dentist can help to detect problems early, fixing them before the condition worsens. The last thing any parent should do is to introduce a child to a dentist when he is already in pain.

A dental check-up: what happens?

First, the dentist will discuss oral hygiene and dietary habits with you to ensure that you are doing the right thing for your child at home.

The dentist will check your child's teeth and gums to look out for things like decay or cracks, and whether the gums are healthy. Bleeding gums are a sign of gum disease.

The dentist will also look at your child's facial bones, cheeks, tongue, and palate to see if there are any unusual swellings. If there are any problems, or if your child requires further treatment, he will discuss follow-up options with you after the examination.



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Sealants to prevent tooth decay

Dentists use special materials called sealants to protect teeth against tooth decay. The chewing surfaces of molars (the teeth at the back of mouth) have deep grooves called “fissures”.

Tooth decay often starts in these areas that toothbrush bristles cannot reach. A layer of sealant can shield these pits and fissures from bacteria and food debris so that tooth decay will not occur.

Sealants are very effective. Best of all, they are painless! After the tooth is cleaned and dried, the dentist applies the sealant on it. Once the sealant hardens, it forms a protective covering over the tooth. If a sealant is worn down or defective, it can be easily repaired or replaced.

Together with proper brushing, flossing, regular dental check-ups, and a balanced diet, sealants can help to ensure that tooth decay is kept at bay.

Preschool Oral Health Promotion Programme

The Preschool Oral Health Promotion Programme reaches out to preschool children in Singapore. This is carried out in kindergartens by dental therapists from the Health Promotion Board.

The programme introduces your child to dental care in a fun way. He is taught the importance of teeth and how to maintain a healthy set of teeth. Through stories, games and songs, he will also learn about the cause of tooth decay and how to prevent it.



School Dental Centre

If your child requires basic dental treatment, you can consider bringing him to the School Dental Centre. This is located at the Health Promotion Board.

Three ways to make an appointment:

- By telephone: 6435 3782
- By fax: 6435 3775
- By email: HPB_Dental_Counter@hpb.gov.sg

Please book your appointment early.

Bring the following documents for verification and registration on the day of your appointment:

- Birth certificate (for Singaporeans)
- Passport/entry permit (for permanent residents and foreigners)

Opening hours are:

- 8.00am to 5.30pm (Monday to Thursday)
- 8.00am to 5.00pm (Friday)
- 8.00am to 12.30pm (Saturday)

Location is on Level 4, Health Promotion Board, 3 Second Hospital Avenue, Singapore 168937.

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Parent-Child Activities


Get Active!

Bond with your child while enjoying these tooth-some activities



Sort Your Food

Cut out a large white tooth and a large yellow tooth from construction paper. Cut out different types of food from magazines. Have your child sort out the food according to those that are good for teeth (place these on the white tooth), and those that are harmful to teeth (place these on the yellow tooth). Talk to your child about eating more of the food on the white tooth.

Brush Your Teeth

Draw a picture of a mouth with teeth. Shade the teeth using a pencil and have your child erase away the black stains with an eraser, to highlight the effects of toothbrushing.

