

## Dental Health Manual for Your Children

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### Tips and Tricks to Keep You and Your Child Smiling



#### Good Dental Health Habits

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As parents we all cherish our children's bright, happy smiles. This is your guide to keeping those smiles healthy and beaming!

This is a manual outlining the way dentists care for their own families' teeth. If you follow these suggestions it is likely that your children will be able to grow up without ever experiencing a cavity!!

#### Age 0-2 years

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##### Pre-Teeth

Babies should get used to having clean mouths. Establish a routine using a clean moist wash cloth to rub over your baby's gums and tongue each day.

##### First Teeth

As the first teeth erupt (on average at about 6 months of age) begin using an infant tooth brush with a thin smear of toothpaste. Infant toothbrushes are very soft and you need to ensure that all of the sticky white plaque on the teeth is cleaned off so be sure to check right down to the gum.

##### Well Baby Visit

A well baby visit to the dentist is a good idea. Check with your dentist to see when they recommend the first dental visit.

##### Cavity Prevention

It is very important to ensure that as soon as your child has their first teeth that your child does not fall asleep with milk or juice in their bottles. If these liquids are left pooling around the teeth during sleep they can cause severe cavities. This also applies to breast milk so try to keep your baby awake while feeding. It is okay to put water in the baby's bottle if they need it to fall asleep.

## Age 2-5 years

### Brushing

Have your toddler practice brushing his/her own teeth and play games to make it a fun time. **You also need to keep brushing for your child.** It is important because children do not develop the fine motor skills necessary to clean their teeth adequately **until they are at least six years of age.**



It is usually easiest to brush and floss with the child lying down and their head in your lap. Do this in an area with good lighting and brush very gently.

#### Tooth Brushing Games

*Count the teeth*  
*Brush my teeth while I brush yours*  
*Yelling Brushing*  
*Singing brushing*  
*Tell a favourite story*  
*Tell a favourite rhyme*

### Flossing

Flossing at this age also becomes important. Once the primary molar teeth (at the back) start to touch each other **daily flossing is needed.** Regular floss is good but as children have very small mouths sometimes floss wands are more practical.



### Sucking Habits

Use of soothers or pacifiers or thumb or finger **sucking habits should be assessed.** Children with frequent, intense and long lasting sessions with sucking habits can have dental and facial growth problems as well as speech issues. For most children these sucking habits will disappear on their own as the child becomes a “big kid”. If your child has a sucking habit and their upper front teeth are protruding or there is a big space between the upper and lower front teeth then it may be prudent to stop the habit earlier. Talk to your dentist or orthodontist if you think this may be a problem.



### Dental Check-Ups

Regular dental check-ups (to polish the teeth, check for cavities, and apply fluoride) should begin at this time. At first all of the procedures may not get completed at each visit, but the exposure to the dental office will create fun experiences that make any necessary treatment later much easier.



### Fluoride

Fluoride is a controversial topic. It is important to know that in Vancouver the water supply is **NOT** fluoridated. As a child's teeth are forming in the jaw ingested fluoride is incorporated in the enamel of the teeth. This makes the teeth much stronger and resistant to cavities. You can purchase fluoride supplements at the pharmacy. They are behind the counter – you have to ask the pharmacist for

them. **While too much fluoride is not good the right amount will create a strong hard surface for life!**

## Food Choices

Food choices are also important. Just the same way we ensure that we are giving our kids healthy foods for their general growth and well being we also need to be careful of certain foods that can cause cavities.

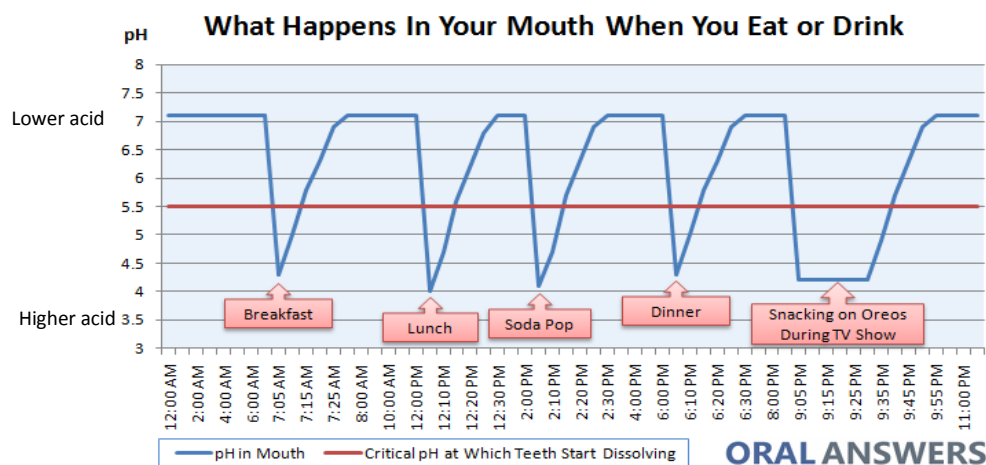


Generally any foods high in sugar and especially those with high sugar and acid in combination are particularly a problem. Some examples that sometimes people don't realize have these characteristics are: dried fruits (roll ups, raisins, craisins, etc), fruit juices and sport drinks (Gatorade, Powerade types) as well as sticky granola bars.

Eating sugar containing foods with meals (as dessert) **or** rinsing with water immediately after eating **or** chewing sugarless gum are all ways to reduce cavity causing potential to the teeth. The acid attack to the tooth surface from eating sugary foods occurs primarily in the first twenty minutes so cleaning away the sugar quickly is important. For this reason snacking choices should be considered.

### Good Snacks for Teeth

- Cheese
- Whole Fruit (not dried)
- Vegetables
- Meats
- Popcorn
- Nuts



## Age 6-11

### Transition to self care!

Children can start to brush and floss for themselves once they are about six years of age. **Parents need to monitor by closely inspecting that no plaque is left on the teeth.** Check particularly at the gum line. There are rinses that can be used to show where the plaque is left on the teeth such as Cool Blue or you can get tablets from your dentist. Encourage your child to spend time cleaning their teeth well. Put their favourite songs on or use a timer to ensure that they spend 2-3minutes brushing. It takes lots of practice to get good at flossing so have your child begin with just the front teeth. You do the back ones until they have the technique mastered.



### Dental and Facial Development

At five or six usually the first permanent molars are erupting behind the last primary teeth. It is especially important to check that these teeth are being brushed well. The lower front baby teeth are usually the first to get loose and fall out which also happens at five or six years of age. **By the age of 7 or 8** the permanent upper front teeth are erupting. **This is the best time to have a visit to the orthodontist.** The orthodontist will check your child's dental and facial development. He/She will be looking to see that the new teeth will have space to grow in properly, that there are no developing bite

problems, that the jaws seem to be growing proportionately and that there are no lingering sucking or mouth breathing habits. Most often no treatment will be recommended at this time but this early visit allows a preventative approach if problems are developing.

### Mouthguards

Mouthguards are highly recommended for some sports such as baseball, hockey, martial arts, rugby etc. at this age. It is very important that young athletes wear their mouthguards. Check often as sometimes the erupting teeth or chewed corners of the guard can make them uncomfortable so the kids leave them out. Get new ones as necessary so they are comfortable and your child's teeth and jaws are protected.



### Dental Check-Ups

Dental Check-ups should be continuing and sometimes the dentist will recommend that plastic coatings (fissure sealants) are placed over the deep grooves and pits on the teeth. **Fissure sealants can be very helpful in preventing cavities** in these areas which can be too small for the tooth brush bristles to get into. The sealants require monitoring though because occasionally they will chip or come off and need to be repaired or replaced. If a chipped sealant is left, the cavity causing bacteria can get underneath and make a large cavity.

## Age 12-16years

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### All Adult Teeth In!

Children of this age should be well in control of their own dental home care.

As the full complement of adult teeth are erupting any **alignment or bite issues are usually ready for orthodontic treatment**. Even if you think that your child's teeth look fine it is a good idea to ask your dentist or orthodontist for an opinion at this time. Occasionally there are issues that are not too obvious (like missing permanent teeth or bite issues) which are really best treated while there is still good growth available.

### Snacks

Older children are sometimes buying their own snacks with their friends so they need to be educated to avoid high sugar snacks. They especially need to be aware of the cavity causing potential of pop, slurpies and Gatorade type drinks.

### Night Guard

If your child has a strong tooth grinding habit a night guard can be made once all of the permanent teeth are erupted.

### Mouthguards

Mouthguards for sports are still really strongly advised. With all of the permanent teeth in place sometimes **a custom made sports**

**mouthguard is a good investment**. These are made in various thicknesses and firmness depending on the sport but should be less bulky and more comfortable than the stock store bought guards.



## Their Smile Will Thank You!

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We need to spend a little time and take care to ensure that we keep a healthy mouth (even as adults) and the reward of a confident smile is a very precious thing.