

## **Good Oral Health for kids -- Ready, Set, Go!**

Good oral health habits need to start at an early age. Brushing and flossing should be an integral part of your child's everyday routine. But when your 2-year-old has the attention span of well, a 2-year-old, it can be hard to engage them in the important task at hand! The key is finding a method that works for your child. Here are a few ideas to help get your child excited about fighting cavities!

- Start by letting your child pick out his or her own toothbrush. With all the fun colors and characters available, your child is sure to find one to his or her liking. Also, keeping a few different flavors of children's toothpaste around will enable your child to choose, thus encouraging involvement.
- Children often mimic the actions of their parents or older siblings. So when you are in the bathroom brushing and flossing your own teeth, invite your child to watch. Be sure to portray brushing as a fun and exciting thing to do rather than a chore.
- Tired of prying your way in every time it's time to brush the tot's teeth? Why not reverse roles and let the child brush yours? Then you can laugh a lot and show how much fun it is to be pampered.
- Take turns. Set an egg timer or other alarm and have the kids brush their teeth on their own for 30 seconds. Then you brush their teeth for 30 seconds. You can also try playing your child's favorite music and take turns brushing for the duration of a favorite song (three to four minutes). When brushing at bedtime, it's important that you have the last go at it. Saliva production slows down during the sleep cycle and can't wash away as much plaque. So it's important to make teeth as plaque-free as possible before going to sleep.

When brushing, it is best to hold the toothbrush against the gumline at an angle -- and with a light grasp. Plaque is soft and is better removed by thorough but light brushing than by vigorous scrubbing, which can cause unwanted wear on teeth. Children's teeth and gums can be sensitive, too, so a gentle touch will make them more comfortable.

Put your younger kids on the path to a healthy, shiny smile today, but don't forget about your older kids.

### ***Don't Forget About Teens***

The preteen and teen years may prove some of the toughest for teeth. Just when you thought the "cavity years" were behind you, the changing chemistry in teens' bodies along with changes in routine and diet can clash. Left unchecked, these factors can eventually contribute to cavities, early gum disease, bad breath and other oral health problems.

Delta Dental of Illinois' dental director recommends that teens keep up their good, lifelong oral health practices and keep an eye out for the following factors that can affect a healthy smile:

- **Hormonal changes:** Hormones released in puberty can cause increased blood circulation in the gums, and the American Academy of Periodontology says that “during this time, the gums may become swollen, turn red and feel tender.” Talk to your dentist if your teen experiences any of these symptoms. He or she can prescribe a treatment program that helps maintain healthy gums and teeth during periods of hormonal change.
- **Diet:** Sugars and starches, all potentially hazardous to your oral health, lurk in many places. Sweetened drinks and candy are obvious culprits, as are bagels, pizza and other breads. Be sure your teen brushes often each day (at least in the morning and at night) and drink lots of water during the day to help rinse his or her mouth of bacteria that can cause cavities and bad breath.
- **Contact sports:** Oral injuries are often permanent, but many can be prevented by wearing a mouthguard while playing sports. Whether your teen has a mouthguard fitted by a dentist or buys one at a store, keep it clean by rinsing it often and storing it in a ventilated container.
- **Eating disorders:** Eating disorders are very serious and can cause many health problems, including damage to the teeth and gums. Bulimia and anorexia can lead to inflammation of the gums, erosion of tooth enamel, cavities and, potentially, can result in the loss of teeth. A dentist can usually treat the oral health problems but cannot treat an eating disorder. If your teen has an eating disorder, try to get help right away.
- **Mouth piercing:** Jewelry in the lips or tongue can chip teeth, scrape gums and cause other problems as well, including serious infections.

For most teenagers, remaining vigilant about oral hygiene should help them get through the teen years with their oral health intact. As always, it remains important to brush at least twice daily, floss once each day and visit a dentist regularly for checkups.

In addition to scheduling regular checkups, parents can periodically check their children's mouths for signs of periodontal disease, including bleeding, swollen and/or bright red gums, persistent bad breath and gums that have receded from the teeth.

**For more information, visit [www.deltadentalil.com/oralhealth](http://www.deltadentalil.com/oralhealth)**