



Dr Matthew Lombardi | Smile Dental

caring for our kids' smiles

Many parents are unsure how much dental care their children need.

At what age should your child first visit the dentist? Start flossing? Brush their teeth by themselves? Follow these guidelines to keep our kids smiling.

Good dental hygiene habits begin before the first teeth appear. Wiping your baby's gums with a soft, damp cloth after feedings helps prevent the build-up of bacteria. As soon as the first tooth appears, usually around six months, it's time to start brushing twice a day with a small, soft-bristled toothbrush.

Your child's first visit to the dentist should take place soon after their first birthday. Your dentist will conduct a quick examination and show you the proper brushing and flossing techniques. Yes, you should start flossing your child's teeth as soon as they have two teeth that touch.

As we have fluoridated water in Townsville, it's important not to start using children's toothpaste until your child is at least 18 months. A small pea-sized amount is all you need. The ingestion of too much fluoride can cause mottling and staining of the developing permanent adult teeth, so ensure all excess toothpaste is spat out.

From the age of about six, when the crowns on the adult teeth are almost completely formed, it's safe to use adult toothpaste. However, your child will still lack the coordination and dexterity to properly brush their teeth on their own. Up to age six, you will need to brush their teeth for them morning and night.

To develop brushing skills, let your child attempt to brush first, then you can thoroughly repeat the process. The best way is to stand behind your



child, facing the same direction. Place one hand on their chin as you brush with the other hand. This process is gentle and easy on both of you.

From six to nine years, you should still be brushing your child's teeth at night, while supervising their own brushing in the morning. Disclosing tablets, which stain plaque red when chewed, can be a great help here.

Baby teeth aren't just for chewing. They also play an important role in speech, swallowing and jaw development. If a baby tooth is lost early, other teeth can drift and close the space for the adult teeth to come into. This may require future orthodontic work to correct the problem.

Good dental hygiene is only half the battle – without a healthy diet, your child will still be prone to getting cavities. Avoid sweets, sticky foods and between-meal snacks. Keep acidic drinks, such as softdrinks and orange juice, to a minimum, as they soften the enamel of the teeth, making them more prone to decay and wear. Have meals and snacks at regular times. Teeth-friendly snacks include fresh fruits and vegetables, cheese and crackers.

Follow these simple guidelines and your kids will be smiling for life.

Material supplied by dentist Dr Matthew Lombardi, who has recently joined the team at Smile Dental.

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