

## Caring for kids' and babies' smiles

Whether your child has "grown-up teeth", "baby teeth" or no teeth, there are important oral hygiene considerations ...

### Teething to six months

- Soothe sore gums by rubbing with a cold spoon or teething ring, or massaging with a clean finger or cloth.
- Teething gels and gum gels, such as Bonjela, are recommended for treating sore gums.
- Teething biscuits can contain sugar, and may contribute to tooth decay.
- Do not "sweeten" a teething ring or pacifier by applying sugary food or drink.

### Feeding

- Water should be given after milk, juice and sweetened food and drink to rinse acids and sugars from the mouth.
- Fill bedtime or comfort bottles with water only-acidic or sugary drinks can cause "nursing bottle cavities".
- Once your child is able to drink from a cup, avoid bottle feeding. Drinking from a cup is more tooth-friendly than from a bottle.

### Diet

- Limit sweet foods as "first solids".
- Encourage a healthy, balanced diet with plenty of fruit and vegetables.
- Limit sugary processed foods-offer raw vegetables.
- Limit frequency of snacks-sugar eaten with meals causes less cavities than sugar in snacks.
- Eat sweet foods at one time of day only-do not spread throughout the day. Encourage brushing after.
- Avoid foods that last in the mouth, such as hard lollies and mints, which give plaque bacteria more opportunity to cause cavities.
- Limit starchy foods and sugar/starch combinations (biscuits, cakes, fast foods)-starch is as harmful to the teeth as sugar, and sugar/starch combinations are more cariogenic than sugars alone.
- When serving juice or Ribena, dilute well with water-these are as harmful to the teeth as softdrink.
- Do not allow children to snack or sip all day.
- At 12 months and over, lift the lip regularly! Check the teeth monthly for early signs of decay-snow-white or yellow-brown marks along the gum line.

### Brushing

- Prior to teething, wipe the gums with a soft, clean cloth or gauze to remove plaque bacteria.
- After teeth erupt, brush with a child's toothbrush-without toothpaste-twice daily, especially before bed.
- Be a good role model-children learn by imitation.
- Help your child learn to brush-use a smear of low-fluoride toothpaste, explaining that it must not be swallowed.
- Encourage your child to hold the toothbrush like a pencil.
- Stand behind your child when helping with brushing-it's easier and your child will find it less intimidating.
- Encourage your child to simply spit out the excess foam, rather than rinsing.
- Supervise brushing until around the age of nine.

### Flossing

- Any teeth that touch should be flossed.
- We suggest flossing at bedtime. Combine it with a good story and your child will enjoy the process.
- Have your child practise with Flossettes or Flosspiks.

### Fluoride

- As Australia's water supply is typically fluoridated, it is generally not necessary to give fluoride drops or tablets to your child. However, water filters may remove fluoride from tap water-check the manufacturer's specifications. Consult your dentist if you use a water filter or have a non-fluoridated water supply.
- A children's low-fluoride toothpaste is still recommended.

### Visiting the dentist

- Encourage a positive attitude towards visits to the dentist-introduce them to the Sparkle Squad!
- Starting dental visits from the age of three will enable us to identify any potential dental problems early. It will also start

your child on a personal dental hygiene plan that will help to ensure healthy teeth and gums for life.

- Talk to your dentist prior to your child's teething to discuss special diet considerations.

See also ...

- Sugar and your smile

- Personal dental hygiene plan