

Early dental care can help keep kids smiling for years to come

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Parents urged to make brushing, flossing and visiting dentist a regular habit.

(HealthDay)—Every baby has a beautiful smile, and to keep it that way, parents should teach good dental habits at an early age, experts say.

A child's first dental appointment should occur six months after the first [teeth](#) erupt or by their first birthday. After that, it is recommended that children see a dentist every six months.

"Childhood [dental decay](#) is largely preventable, and taking your child to see a dentist at an early age is the best way to prevent future oral health problems," Academy of General Dentistry spokesperson Dr. R. Claire Campbell said in an academy news release. "This will instill positive behaviors that will result in a lifetime of good oral health."

As part of National Children's [Dental](#) Health Month in February, the group offered the following tips for parents:

- When the first teeth come in, parents should begin brushing the child's teeth. Brush for two minutes twice a day using a small, soft-bristled toothbrush and water. Talk to your dentist before using toothpaste in children under age 2.
- Introduce flossing early. Helping kids learn how to floss will encourage them to make it a routine as they get older.
- Do not allow excessive sucking of [pacifiers](#) or fingers, which can lead to tooth misalignment.
- Don't let children fall asleep with a bottle containing milk, formula, [fruit juice](#) or sweetened liquids. A decrease in the flow of saliva while they sleep makes children's teeth more susceptible to cavities caused by sugar in these liquids.
- Encourage kids to drink tap or fountain water. If you live in an area where the public water supply is not fluoridated, consider talking to your dentist about fluoride supplements.

"The best way to teach a child how to brush is to lead by good example," Campbell said. "Allow your child to watch you brush your teeth to teach the importance of good oral hygiene."

More information: The Nemours Foundation has more about [keeping your children's teeth healthy](#).

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