

Tips for Brushing Your Infant or Toddler's Teeth

Caring for your child's baby teeth is important. Baby teeth are needed for chewing, speaking, and holding spaces for adult teeth. Brushing their child's baby teeth is something parents do to keep their children healthy, like applying sunblock or using seatbelts.

Parents need to brush their children's teeth at least twice a day - at morning and at night. Children younger than 7 years are not able to do a good job brushing on their own. If your child brushes their own teeth, you should also brush their teeth to be sure they have brushed the hard to reach spots.

Start early and make brushing a daily routine.

- Before your baby even has teeth, use a clean washcloth to wipe the inside of the mouth clean.
- Make teeth brushing a family activity. Let your child see you brushing your own teeth.
- Begin using a soft bristled toothbrush as soon as the first tooth appears. You may soak the toothbrush in warm water to soften the bristles even more.
- Always praise your child in a calm voice for brushing his or her teeth.

Remember tooth brushing itself is not a choice.

- Tell your child it is time to brush, don't ask.
- Offer your child a choice between toothbrushes to use.
- Use toothpaste made for children. Some regular toothpastes use strong flavorings that you may not notice but they can sting young mouths.

Practice effective tooth brushing techniques.

- Have your child lay down with his or her head in your lap to easily see into the mouth for brushing.
- Lean over your child while he or she is sitting in a high chair or car seat and slightly tilt your child's head back to brush.
- After a bath, wrap your infant or toddler in a warm towel and brush his or her teeth while arms are snugly secured.

Make tooth brushing FUN!

- Sing your child a song, especially a silly one, while brushing his or her teeth.
- Create a game of "Copy Cat". Brush your child's teeth and then have your child brush the teeth of a doll or favorite stuffed animal.
- Offer to "paint" your child's teeth with toothpaste and let your child brush the paint off. Reverse roles.
- Play the "Sugar Bug" game. Pretend you see a "sugar bug" that you have to catch with your child's toothbrush. Once the "sugar bugs" have been caught, rinse them down the sink.
- Pretend to be the dentist gently cleaning teeth.
- Use a wash cloth puppet and let the puppet brush your child's teeth.
- Have your child make funny, scary or strange faces in a mirror to open his or her mouth wide. A "piggy nose" is a good face for getting access to front teeth.
- Distract your child with a favorite toy, movie, or television show while brushing.

Reinforce the message.

- Use a chart to track your child's tooth brushing habits. Reward your child for completing the chart.
- Remind your child that "children who don't brush their teeth don't get to have a sugary treat".
- Tell your child that after brushing at night, they get no more snacks or drinks other than water.
- Begin visits to the dentist starting at age 1.

Brush your child's teeth even if they fuss or cry. Remember that you are not hurting your child but you are keeping his or her mouth clean and cavity-free!

The "Baby Those Baby Teeth" campaign is a project of the Greater Flint Health Coalition's Children's Oral Health Task Force. For additional project information, call 810-232-2228. Other children's oral health resources are available for order via www.gfhc.org.

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