

How to Look After Your Child's Teeth

What is dental caries and what causes it?

Dental caries, also known as tooth decay, is caused by bacteria which produce acids that destroy the outer layer of teeth.

About 40% of preschoolers in Singapore suffer from severe tooth decay¹. The main causes of tooth decay in children are:

1. Frequent snacking
2. Prolonged bottle feeding
3. Breastfeeding or bottle feeding a child to sleep
4. Poor oral hygiene

Tooth decay affects your child's dental and general health. If you do not seek treatment, this may cause:

- Pain and infection
- Poor eating or sleeping patterns
- Poor appearance and loss of self-esteem
- Higher risk of new decay in other baby and adult teeth
- Loss of time at school

Oral Hygiene

1. Use a clean wash cloth and water to clean your infant's gums to remove leftover breastmilk/formula milk after feeding.
2. Once teeth appear, use an age-appropriate (suitable for that particular age) soft bristled toothbrush to brush your child's teeth twice a day - after breakfast and before bed at night.
3. Your child may be allowed to brush his/her own teeth under the supervision of an adult. However, this must be immediately followed by thorough brushing by the supervising adult until the child is at least 7 years old.
4. You can help your child floss his/her teeth as it will decrease their risk of decay. Ask your dentist to show you how to floss effectively.

¹ National Dental Centre Singapore, Early Childhood Caries, NDCS Website accessed on 28/8/18

Toothpaste

1. For children younger than 3 years old, begin brushing your child's teeth as soon as they appear in the mouth. Use a 1000 ppm fluoride toothpaste in a smear-sized amount (shown in the picture below).
2. For children 3 to 6 years of age, use a pea-sized amount (shown in the picture below) of 1000 ppm fluoride toothpaste. Supervise your child's brushing to reduce swallowing of toothpaste.

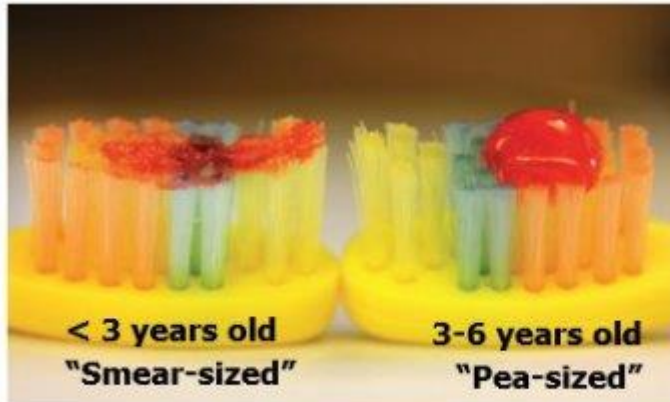


Photo Credit: Journal of the American Dental Association, Fluoride toothpaste use for young children, Feb 2014

Diet

1. Start training your baby to drink from a cup after the child turns one.
2. Breast/Bottle-feeding your child to sleep is not recommended.
3. Sweet foods should be eaten following main meals as desserts rather than as snacks in between meals. Examples of tooth-friendly choices are cheese, fruits, nuts and yoghurt.

Why must I bring my child to the dental clinic?

1. To monitor your child's dental development
2. To detect oral diseases early
3. To establish a good dentist-child relationship to allow for more pleasant dental visits in the future
4. To instill in your child a sense of responsibility towards good oral hygiene and regular dental visits

Who should I seek treatment from?

You may visit your family dentist, paediatric dentist (a dentist who specialises in the care of children's teeth), or an Oral Health Therapist (OHT). The type of treatment can range from chairside treatment to general anaesthesia at the specialist centre. The choice of treatment depends on many factors such as the child's age, how well your child cooperates during treatment and how bad the decay is.

When should my child first see the dentist?

The first dental visit is recommended when your child's first tooth appears and no later than age one.

Choose an appointment time when your child is well rested. Bring with you any records of your child's medical history and your child's toothbrush.

You can prepare your child for the visit by:

1. Telling your child what to expect through a story or role-play.
2. Letting your child watch an elder sibling or parent receiving treatment at the dental clinic.
3. Not scaring your child with negative words such as "scary, pain or injection".
4. Not making the dentist look like the "bad guy".

Make a dental appointment

For preschoolers, their parent/guardian can make an appointment with the Health Promotion Board at 6435 3782.

If you would like to return to NHG Polyclinics, you may book an appointment 6 months ahead via the NHG Health Mobile App or call our Contact Centre at 6355 3000. Please note that dental appointment slots are released on the 1st day of each month and availability is subject to demand.