

## Pediatric Dental Health

By Dr. Denise Cohen

As a pediatric dentist, parents often ask me why cavities in baby teeth need to be fixed. Baby teeth are very important for several obvious reasons, such as chewing food, facilitating speech, and maintaining appearance. There are also two other issues that I am concerned about as a pediatric dentist. First, untreated cavities grow larger, cause discomfort, and are at risk of infection. Second, since infected teeth are often extracted, this may lead to orthodontic problems down the road because baby teeth preserve space in the jaws for the adult teeth that will come. For these reasons, it is best to treat cavities in baby teeth as quickly as possible after they are diagnosed.

Parents often ask what could have been done to prevent these cavities from forming. Every par-

ent can do three simple things to promote their children's oral health: maintain oral hygiene, provide a healthy diet, and schedule regular pediatric dental visits.



Oral hygiene is an important part of overall hygiene. The best way to incorporate these behaviors is to make them part of your

child's daily routine. Be sure to include teeth brushing and flossing as part of the nighttime and morning activities. There are many kid-friendly products available to help you. Feel free to explore what works best for you and your child. However, make sure that the toothpaste has fluoride and the toothbrush has soft bristles. For more guidance, feel free to make an appointment or visit my website.

To help prevent tooth decay, offer your child a healthy diet by following these three quick tips: First, limit your child's consumption of candy, especially sucking candies (e.g., lollipops) and sticky candy (e.g., fruit rolls). After eating any candy, have your child brush his or her teeth. Second, limit your child's consumption of sugary drinks, such as soda, all juices, and chocolate/strawberry milk, to one cup per day. Third, after brushing and

flossing in the evening, only give your child water.

Pediatric dental visits are an important part of maintaining your child's overall health. Just as you take your child to the pediatrician for regular check ups, you should take your child to the pediatric dentist on a regular basis. The first visit should be when the first tooth appears or by age 1, whichever comes first. Afterwards, a check-up is recommended every six months to prevent cavities and other dental problems.

Following this advice will help your child develop and maintain a warm, healthy smile. ♥

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