

Dental: Teeth and Gum Care

Healthy teeth and gums are very important to the health of your child. Teeth must be cleaned to remove food and plaque (plak). Plaque is a harmful layer of bacteria on the teeth that can cause cavities. To prevent cavities and gum disease, teeth must be brushed every day.

You Will Need

- A toothbrush small enough to reach every tooth. (The bristles should be made of soft polished nylon with a flat brushing surface.)
- Fluoride toothpaste
- Dental floss
- Gauze squares

Mouth Care for Infants

- Parents should begin to brush their baby's teeth as soon as teeth appear in the mouth. Cleanse your baby's mouth with a soft toothbrush (Picture 1). Dip the toothbrush in water or use a small amount of fluoride toothpaste (about the size of a small pea). Use a clean gauze square dipped in water if your baby does not like a toothbrush.
- Do not put your baby to bed with a bottle of formula, milk or juice. The sugar in the milk or juice can cause cavities. You may give your baby plain water in a bottle at bedtime.



Picture 1 Clean your child's mouth well **at least once a day.**

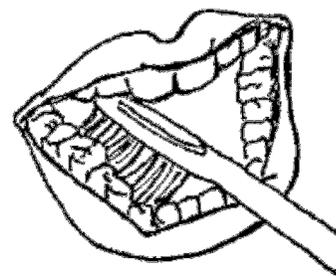
How to Teach Your Child to Brush His Teeth

Children should be able to brush their teeth by themselves by age 11. Until then, parents should watch or help, based on their child's abilities. For younger children, you'll need to give lots of help. It may take your child several months to learn how to brush properly. Children can learn by watching their parents. Use the method described below. At first, have your child repeat what you have done after each step.

Continued on page 2

How to Teach Your Child to Brush His Teeth, continued

1. Place the head of the toothbrush along the side of the teeth. Angle the bristle tips against the gum line (Picture 2). Move the toothbrush back and forth several times, using a gentle "scrubbing" motion.
2. Brush the outer surfaces of each tooth, uppers and lowers, keeping the bristles angled against the gum line.
3. Brush all the inside surfaces and chewing surfaces of the teeth, upper and lower, in the same way.
4. For the inside surfaces of the front teeth, tilt the brush so the bristles point up. Make several gentle back-and-forth strokes over the teeth and gum tissue with the front part of the toothbrush.



Picture 2 Angle the bristles against the gum line.

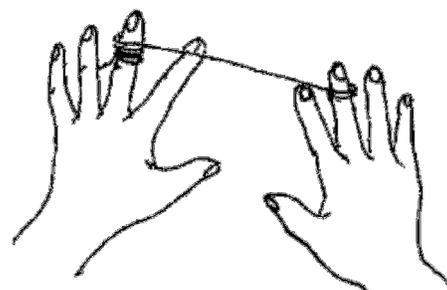
Tooth Brushing Tips

- A worn-out toothbrush will not clean your child's teeth well. Replace the toothbrush at least every 3 months.
- The toothbrush will clean only 1 or 2 teeth at a time. Change its position often.
- Brush gently and with very short strokes but use enough pressure so the bristles are felt against the gum.
- Brushing the tongue with the toothbrush will help your child's mouth feel fresh.
- While it's better to brush after every meal, teach your child to **brush thoroughly at least twice every day** so the plaque does not build up.
- If your child has pain or bleeding very often while brushing, call your dentist.

How to Use Dental Floss

Flossing removes the sticky layer of harmful bacteria called plaque (plak) that can't be reached by a toothbrush. When your child's teeth are so close together that their sides touch, you should begin to floss the child's teeth. Flossing, like tooth brushing, takes time and practice to do properly. By 11 or 12 years of age, your child can learn to floss his own teeth. To floss:

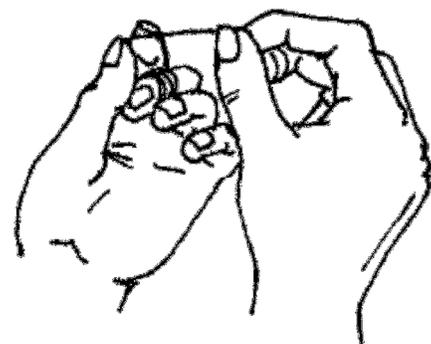
1. Break off about 18 inches of floss and wind most of it around the middle finger of one hand.
2. Wind the rest around the middle finger of the other hand. This finger can "take up" the floss as it becomes soiled or worn (Picture 3).



Picture 3 Wind the floss around your middle fingers (not too tightly).

How to Use Dental Floss, continued

3. Use your thumbs and forefingers with an inch of floss between them to guide the floss between the teeth (Picture 4).
4. While holding the floss tightly (there should be no slack), use a gentle sawing motion to insert the floss between the teeth. Never "snap" the floss into the gums! When the floss reaches the gum line, curve it into a C-shape against one tooth and **gently slide** it into the space between the gum and the tooth until you feel resistance (Picture 5). Always keep one finger behind the tooth you are flossing and the other finger in front of that same tooth.
5. While holding the floss tightly against the tooth, move the floss away from the gum by scraping the floss up and down against the side of each tooth.
6. Repeat this method on the rest of the teeth.

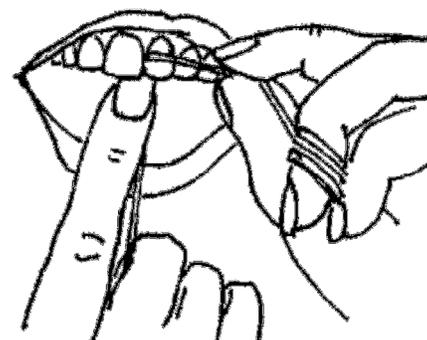


Picture 4 Use your thumbs and forefingers to hold the floss.

Other Tips for Healthy Teeth

Teach your child these tips for healthy teeth:

- Brush the teeth every morning and night.
- Brush the teeth or rinse the mouth with water after eating.
- Have a dental checkup every 6 months.
- Eat crunchy raw fruit and vegetables.
- Drink milk to make teeth strong.
- Have candy or soda pop only for special treats.
- Drink water instead of soda pop or sweet drinks if you are thirsty.



Picture 5 Floss each tooth.

If you have any questions, be sure to ask your dentist, dental hygienist, or dental assistant or call _____.