



Your mouth is talking. *Are you listening?*

Those white things?

They're not just **baby teeth**. They hold the place for your **grown-up teeth**. Take care of them now to prevent big problems later. You need dental checkups. You don't need sugary drinks. Pretty please!

YOUR MOUTH

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Oral Health and Early Childhood

Whether or not your child is talking yet, there are a few things his or her mouth has to say. A common and dangerous mistake among parents is ignoring the importance of baby teeth just because they are not permanent. Baby teeth reserve space for developing grown-up teeth and help children speak and chew. Tooth decay and infection also can result in the child having difficulty eating, speaking, playing or learning. The Missouri Dental Association (MDA) urges parents to consider the following tips for helping children establish good dental habits from the start.

- **DAILY CARE** Good oral hygiene should begin at birth. Before teeth erupt, clean baby's gums with a damp washcloth. When teeth begin to appear, use a soft, age-appropriate toothbrush with water. Once the child is able to spit, use a pea-size amount of fluoridated toothpaste. Children need help brushing correctly until they can write in cursive.
- **FIRST DENTAL VISIT** The American Dental Association and the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry both recommend scheduling a child's first dental visit around the first birthday. Baby teeth are at risk for decay as soon as they are in the mouth. A dentist can answer any questions parents have and catch potential problems early.
- **DRINKS AND NUTRITION** Formula and milk are good for baby, right? Right. But they do contain sugar that can cause tooth decay if it sits on teeth for an extended period of time. Clean teeth and gums after bedtime feedings, and never leave a bottle or sip cup in the crib. Limit milk to meal times and only offer 4-6 ounces of juice per day after a baby is 1 year old; water should be offered between meals. When it comes to food, provide nutritious choices to build strong teeth from the inside.
- **MOM AND DAD'S ORAL HEALTH** Did you know tooth decay can be infectious? Parents with poor oral health can pass bacteria from their own saliva to their babies through some of the same kinds of activities that can pass on a cold, like sharing spoons or blowing on hot food. The most vulnerable time for infection is between 6 and 31 months. So an important part of taking care of baby's teeth is to take care of your own.

Make brushing more fun:

- *Establish a tooth-brushing routine*
- *Have kids brush with a sibling, mom or their favorite person*
- *Use a sticker chart to record the day's brushing*
- *Make up a silly song for tooth-brushing time*
- *Have a special spot for your toothbrush and paste*

SOURCES

The American Dental Association and The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry

Brush, floss and visit your MDA dentist.

For more on what your mouth is trying to tell you, visit YourMouthIsTalking.org.