Healthy Habits for Happy Smiles

Brushing Your Child's Teeth

Brushing is one of the main ways you can keep your child's teeth healthy. You should brush your child's teeth with fluoride toothpaste twice each day to help prevent tooth decay (cavities). Begin brushing as soon as your child's first tooth begins to show.

School readiness begins with health!

Tips for brushing your child's teeth:

- Brush your child's teeth after breakfast and before bed.
- Use a child-sized toothbrush with soft bristles and fluoride toothpaste.
  - For children under age 3, use a small smear of fluoride toothpaste.
  - For children ages 3 to 6, use fluoride toothpaste the size of a pea.
- Young children like to do things by themselves. It's good to let children brush their teeth while an adult watches. But children under age 7 or 8 cannot brush their teeth well yet. An adult needs to brush the child's teeth too.
- Find a position where your child is comfortable and you can see your child's teeth while you brush. For example, sit on the floor with your baby's or young child's head in your lap. Or stand behind your child in front of the mirror.
- Gently brush your child's teeth using small circles. Brush all surfaces of the teeth, including the insides and outsides.
- After brushing, have your child spit out the remaining toothpaste but not rinse. The small amount of toothpaste that stays in your child's mouth is good for the teeth.
- If you are having trouble brushing your child's teeth, use a timer, a counting game, or a song while brushing. You can also ask the staff at your child's dental clinic for help.

Use a smear for children under age 3.

Use a pea-size amount for children ages 3 to 6.

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Healthy Habits for Happy Smiles

Choosing Healthy Drinks for Your Young Child

Choose drinks that will help keep your child healthy. Many drinks have natural or added sugar. Children who are often given sugary drinks are more likely to have tooth decay (cavities). You might not even know you are giving your child drinks with sugar! Water or milk are the best drinks for your child.

School readiness begins with health!

Tips for choosing healthy drinks for your child:

- Breast milk is best. Breastfeed your child for 6 months or longer.
- Give your child plain water with fluoride. Water from the tap (faucet) is safe and cheap.
- Give your child milk at scheduled meal and snack times.
- It is best not to put your child to bed with a bottle or sippy cup. If you do, the bottle or sippy cup should contain only water, nothing else.
- Give your child cut-up or whole fruit instead of fruit juice.
- If you give your child juice, wait until he is 6 months old. Offer your child no more than 4 to 6 ounces of 100-percent fruit juice each day. Serve juice in a cup.
- If your child drinks from a sippy cup, it should contain only water or milk, nothing else. By age 12 to 14 months, most children can drink from a cup.

Do you know how much sugar is in each drink?

Teaspoons of sugar in each 4-ounce drink.

3 1/2 Grape juice	3 1/2 Cola	3 Apple juice	3 Fruit drink
2 1/2 Chocolate milk	2 Orange juice	1 1/2 Low-fat milk	0 Water

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Healthy Habits for Happy Smiles

Finding a Dental Clinic for Your Child

Children need to visit the dental clinic to keep their teeth and mouth healthy. If children have regular dental visits, the dentist and dental hygienist can take care of their teeth and find oral health problems early. Here are tips for finding a dental clinic that is best for you and your child.

School readiness begins with health!

Tips for finding a dental clinic:

- Ask your child's Head Start teacher or other parents for suggestions.
- Ask your child's doctor for a referral.
- Visit these websites for finding a dentist in your community:
  - http://www.aapd.org/finddentist
  - http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/find-a-dentist
  - http://www.insurekidsnow.gov

Questions to ask when choosing a dental clinic:

- Is your clinic taking new patients?
- Does your clinic take my child's insurance (for example, Medicaid or CHIP)?
- Do any of your staff speak my language? Can they translate so I can understand?
- Does clinic staff have training or experience treating young children?
- When is the next appointment for a new patient?
- What happens during a new patient visit?
- Is your clinic close to public transportation?
- When is your clinic open? Is it open evenings or on weekends?
- What information or forms do I need to bring to fill out your paperwork (for example, my child's insurance card or a Head Start oral health form)?
- Are there books, toys, or other things for children in your waiting room?

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Healthy Habits for Happy Smiles

Getting Fluoride for Your Child

Fluoride is found in nature in soil, plants, and water. Fluoride is safe. Drinking tap (faucet) water with fluoride, brushing with fluoride toothpaste, and having a health professional apply fluoride varnish to the teeth are important ways to make teeth strong and prevent tooth decay.

School readiness begins with health!

Fluoride in Water

- Since most water doesn't have enough natural fluoride to prevent tooth decay, many communities add fluoride to their water supply (tap water) used for drinking and cooking.
- Give your child tap water with fluoride. If you are not sure if your water has enough fluoride, ask your child's dental clinic for help in finding out.
- Some bottled waters contain fluoride, and some do not. Check with the bottled water's manufacturer to ask about the fluoride content of a particular brand.
- If your tap water does not have enough fluoride, ask your dental or medical clinic if your child needs fluoride drops or tablets.

Fluoride Toothpaste

- Brush your child's teeth after breakfast and before bed once the first tooth begins to show.
- Use a child-sized toothbrush with soft bristles and fluoride toothpaste.
- See *Healthy Habits for Happy Smiles: Brushing Your Child's Teeth* for more information.

Fluoride Varnish

- Fluoride varnish is painted on a child's teeth to prevent or reduce cavities.
- It is not permanent but keeps fluoride on the teeth for several hours.
- Fluoride varnish has a pleasant taste and is well tolerated by children.

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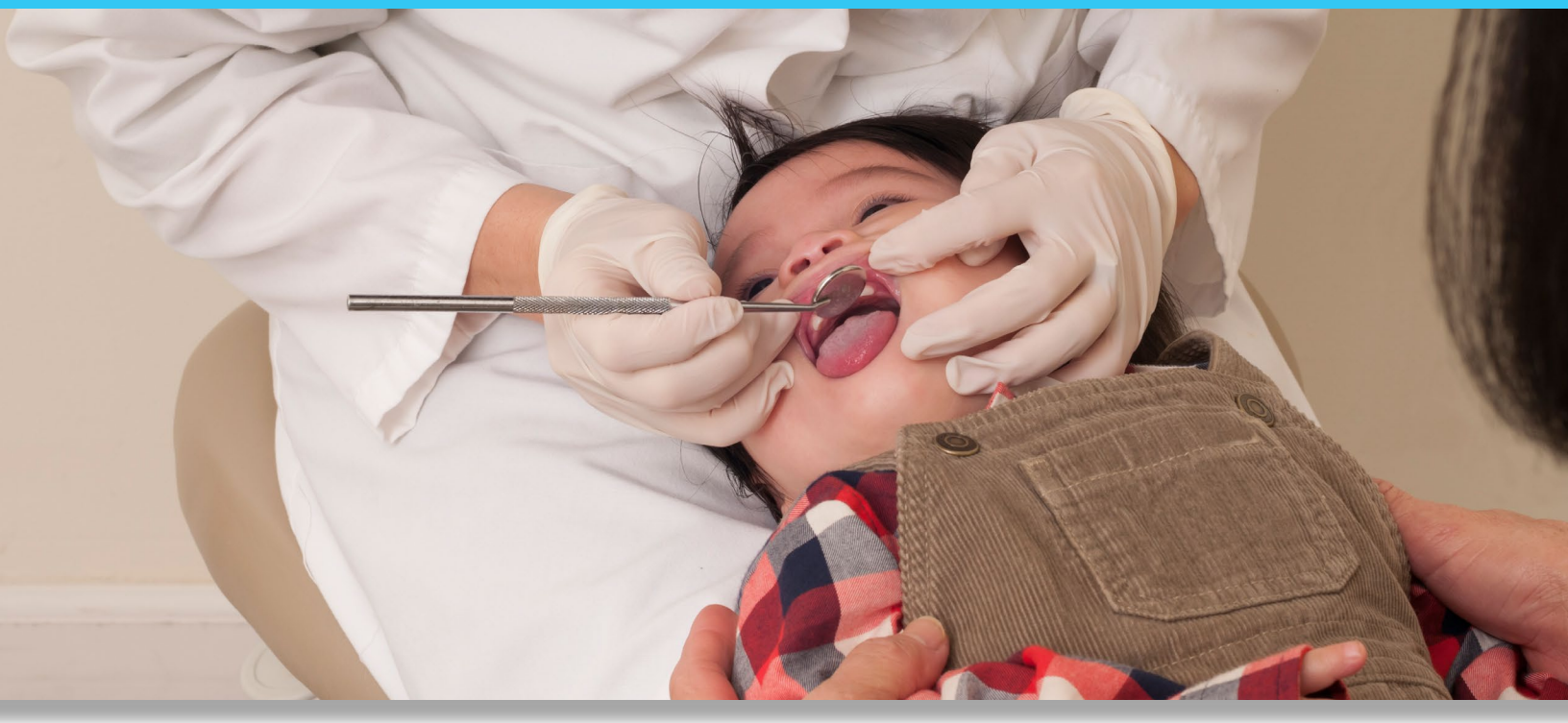
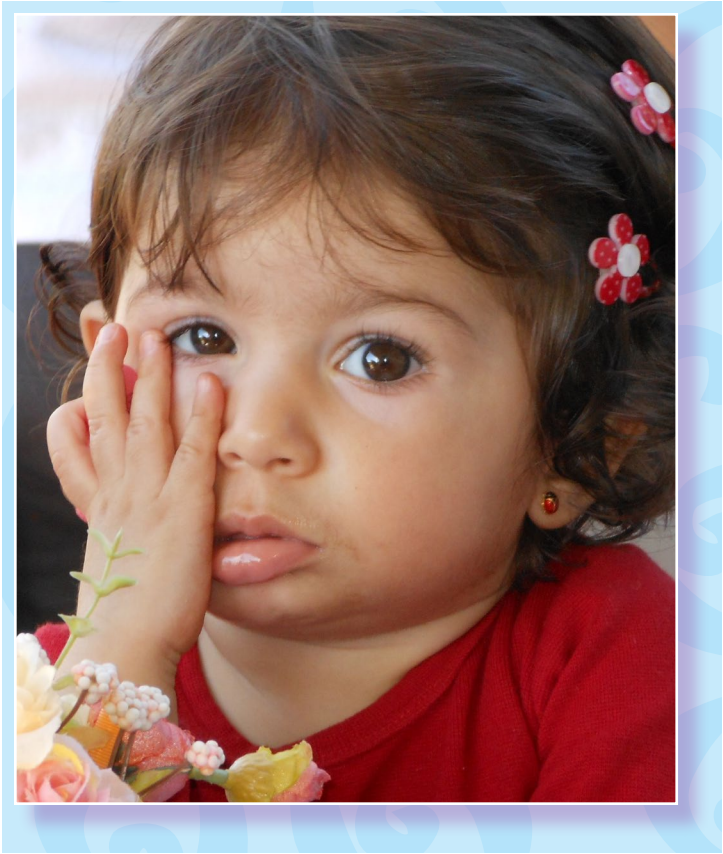


Giving First Aid for Your Child's Oral Injuries

Injuries to the head, face, and mouth are common in young children. Even when parents do their best to keep children safe, oral injuries can happen. Most oral injuries happen when young children are learning to walk. The top front teeth are injured most often.



Tips to help you know what to do for common oral injuries:

- **Tongue or lip injured.** Clean the injured area. Press a clean washcloth on it to stop bleeding. Keep your child's head up and facing forward to prevent choking. Put ice, wrapped in a clean washcloth, on the area to reduce swelling. If bleeding doesn't stop after 30 minutes, take your child to your child's dentist or doctor right away. If the dentist or doctor is not available, take your child to the nearest urgent care center right away.
- **Tooth chipped or cracked.** Clean the injured area. Contact your child's dentist or an urgent care center right away. Have your child rinse with water, if possible. If there is bleeding, press a clean washcloth on the gum around the tooth to stop it.
- **Tooth knocked out**. Contact your child's dentist right away. Do not try to put a baby tooth back into the mouth. Clean the injured area. If there is bleeding, have your child bite on the area with a clean washcloth for 15 to 30 minutes to stop it.
- **Tooth knocked loose, moved, or pushed into gum**. If your child's tooth has been knocked loose, moved forward or backward, or pushed into the gum, contact your child's dentist or an urgent care center right away. Have your child rinse with water, if possible. Press a clean washcloth on the gum around the tooth to stop bleeding.
- **Toothache.** If your child has a toothache, it is likely that the tooth has a cavity. Make a dental appointment as soon as possible to find out what the problem is and get treatment.

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Healthy Habits for Happy Smiles

Giving Your Child Healthy Snacks

Young children eat small amounts of food because their stomachs are small. In addition to giving your child healthy meals, giving your child a variety of healthy snacks at scheduled times during the day is important to keep your child healthy. Encourage your child to try new foods.

School readiness begins with health!

Tips for healthy snacks:

- Give your child a variety of healthy snacks, such as:
  - Fruits like apples, bananas, oranges, or berries
    - Give your child cut-up or whole fruit instead of fruit juice.
  - Vegetables like broccoli, carrots, celery, cucumbers, or peppers
  - Foods made with whole grains, like cereals, crackers, bread, or bagels
  - Dairy products like low-fat milk, cheese, cottage cheese, and unsweetened yogurt
- Avoid foods that may cause choking, like popcorn, nuts, seeds, raw carrots, or whole grapes. Cut food into small pieces.
- Give your child water or milk to drink with snacks.
- Do not give your child sweets like candy, cookies, and cake at snack time. And do not give your child sweet drinks like fruit-flavored drinks, pop (soda), and fruit juice at snack time.

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Healthy Habits for Happy Smiles

Helping Your Baby with Teething Pain

It is exciting to see your baby's first tooth! Baby (primary) teeth begin to come in when your child is about 6 to 10 months old. For some babies, teething hurts. As teeth come in, babies might be cranky or drool more. They might have sore or swollen gums. And they may chew on things.

School readiness begins with health!

Tips for helping your baby with teething pain:

- Check your child's teeth and mouth.
- Rub your baby's gums with a clean finger. The rubbing may make your baby's gums feel better.
  - Find teething toys that have solid pieces. Loose pieces can break off and make your baby choke.
  - It is best not to use teething toys that have liquid in them. Your baby could chew a hole into them.
  - Don't put any teething toys or necklaces around your baby's neck. And don't pin or clip them to your baby's clothes. The toy could get tangled around your baby's neck and make her choke.
- Give your baby something cool to chew on. Clean, refrigerated spoons, pacifiers, teething rings, and wet washcloths are good choices. Don't put teething rings in the freezer. That makes them too cold for your baby's mouth.
- With your baby seated in a high chair, offer a chunk of frozen banana or plain bagel to chew on. Give your baby the whole piece of food. Don't cut it into small pieces. Keep an eye on your baby when she eats in case she chokes.
- Don't use teething gels or liquids on your baby's gums. They are not safe.

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Healthy Habits for Happy Smiles

Preventing Injuries to Your Child's Mouth

As a parent, you want to keep your child safe, but you learn that injuries can happen in a moment. Children can injure their mouths when they fall or trip. They can also injure their mouths when they climb on furniture or run with something in their mouth.

School readiness begins with health!

Tips for preventing injuries to your child's mouth:

- Use safety gates at the top and bottom of stairs.
- Put safety locks or latches on cabinets and drawers.
- Cover sharp corners.
- Keep one hand on your child while he is on a changing table.
- When feeding your child, put her in a high chair or booster seat. Remember to buckle the seatbelt.
- Always buckle your child into the car seat in the back seat of a car or truck.
- Pick up toys and keep floors clear so children don't trip and fall.
- Make sure rugs have nonskid pads or backing.
- Watch your child when he is on high places, like playground equipment.
- Put your baby in a front pack while shopping. Or put your child in the shopping cart and use a safety belt. Don't leave your child alone or out of reach in a shopping cart.
- Don't let your child walk or run with anything in her mouth, like sippy cups, popsicles, or toys.

In case of emergency, call your child's dental or medical clinic right away. If you can't reach them, take your child to the emergency room. Give your child's dental and medical clinic phone numbers to others who take care of your child.

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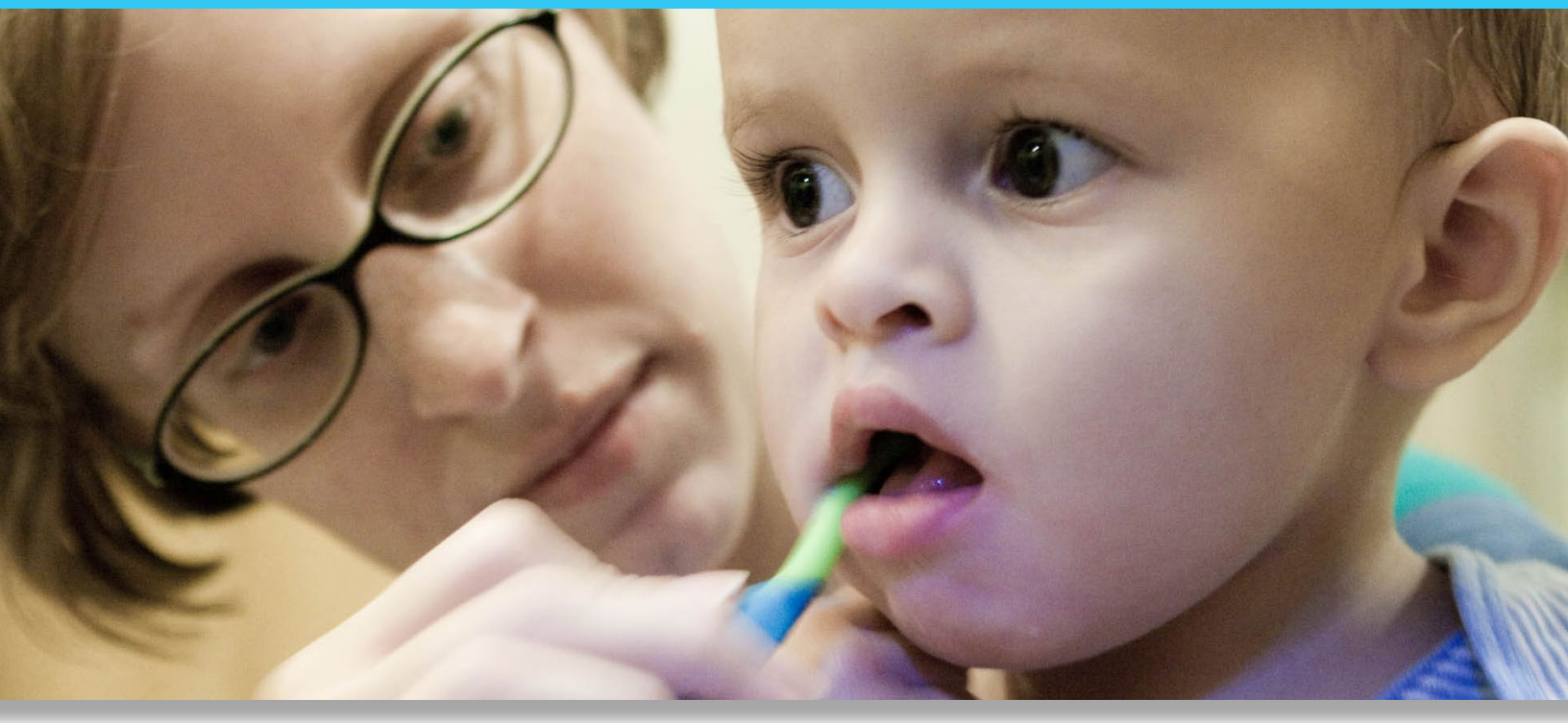

Taking Care of Your Baby's Oral Health

Taking good care of your baby's mouth and teeth is important. A baby's first tooth usually comes in at around age 6 to 10 months. Healthy primary (baby) teeth help children chew food and speak clearly.

School readiness begins with health!

Tips for keeping your baby's mouth and teeth healthy:

- Cleaning your baby's gums and teeth
  - Clean your baby's gums even before you can see the first tooth. Use a clean, damp washcloth to wipe the gums. Do this twice a day, especially after night feeding.
  - After your baby's first tooth comes in, use a baby toothbrush with soft bristles and a small head. Put a smear (size of a grain of rice) of fluoride toothpaste on the toothbrush, and brush all sides of your baby's teeth.
  - Brush your baby's teeth in the morning and before bedtime.
- Using bottles and sippy cups
  - Do not put your baby to bed with a bottle or sippy cup filled with breast milk, infant formula, fruit juice, or other liquids besides water. Liquids that contain sugar can cause tooth decay.
- Using pacifiers
  - Clean the pacifier with soap and water.
  - Never clean a pacifier in your mouth before giving it to your baby. Germs that cause tooth decay can pass from your mouth to your baby's mouth.
  - If the pacifier gets worn out or breaks, get a new one.
  - Do not dip the pacifier in sweet foods like sugar, honey, or syrup.
  - Never put a pacifier on a string or ribbon around your baby's neck. It could choke your baby.

Use a smear of fluoride toothpaste.

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Healthy Habits for Happy Smiles

Taking Care of Your Oral Health When You Are Pregnant

Taking good care of your oral health is important for you and your baby. It is safe and important to get oral health care when you are pregnant. Practicing good oral hygiene, eating healthy foods, and getting oral health care will help keep you and your baby healthy.

School readiness begins with health!

Tips for keeping your mouth and teeth healthy when you are pregnant:

- Eat healthy foods, like whole-grain products; fruits; vegetables; and low-fat milk, cheese, cottage cheese, and unsweetened yogurt. Meats, fish, chicken, eggs, beans, and nuts are also good choices.
- Drink water, especially between meals and snacks. Drink tap water that has fluoride.
- Eat healthy snacks, like fruits; vegetables; and low-fat milk, cheese, cottage cheese, and unsweetened yogurt.
- Eat fewer sweets like candy, cookies, cake, and dried fruits. Drink fewer sugary drinks like fruit-flavored drinks, pop (soda), and fruit juice. If you eat sweets or drink sugary drinks, have them only at mealtimes.
- Brush your teeth with a soft toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste twice a day, after breakfast and before bed. Do not rinse after brushing. The small amount of toothpaste that stays in your mouth is good for the teeth.
- Floss once a day before bed.
- Rinse every night with an over-the-counter alcohol-free mouthrinse with fluoride.
- If you vomit, rinse your mouth with a teaspoon of baking soda in a cup of water. This helps prevent damage to your teeth.
- Get oral health care. If your last dental visit took place more than 6 months ago or if you have any oral health problems or concerns, schedule a dental appointment as soon as possible.
- Tell the dental clinic that you are pregnant and your due date. This information will help staff provide the best care for you.

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Toothbrushing Positions for Your Child with a Disability

Some children with disabilities need extra help brushing their teeth. There are many ways to position a child for brushing. These may change with a child's age, and they depend on the child's physical or medical condition. Try different positions for brushing your child's teeth to find one that works for your child and you.

School readiness begins with health!

Tips for different positions to brush your child's teeth:

- **On the floor.** Place your child on the floor, sitting up. Sit right behind him or her, on a chair or stool. Tip the child's head back into your lap. If your child will not sit still, gently place your legs over your child's arms to keep him or her still. You can also lay your child on the floor, with his or her head on a pillow or on your lap. Kneel or sit behind your child's head. If you need to, use your arm to keep him or her still.
- **In a beanbag chair.** If your child can't sit up, place your child in a beanbag chair. Use the same position described above for sitting on the floor.
- **On a bed or sofa.** Lay your child on a bed or sofa, with his or her head in your lap. Support your child's head and shoulders with your arm. If your child will not stay still, another person can gently hold his or her hands and feet.
- **In a chair or wheelchair.** Stand behind the chair or wheelchair. Use your arm to brace the child's head against the chair or wheelchair or against your body. You can use a pillow to make the child more comfortable. Or, sit behind the chair or wheelchair and tilt it back into your lap. Remember to lock the wheels of the wheelchair.
- **Warning:** Some children make extra saliva during toothbrushing. To prevent the child from choking on saliva, make sure the child's head is not tilted far back. Whichever toothbrushing position you choose, hold the child's head upright or to the side. That will help stop saliva from running down the child's throat. This warning is especially important for children who have a poor swallowing reflex or poor tongue control.

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Healthy Habits for Happy Smiles

Toothbrushing Tips for Your Child with a Disability

Some children with disabilities need extra help to take care of their teeth. Young children, especially those with a physical, emotional, behavioral, intellectual, or communication disability, may not have the fine motor skills they need to clean their teeth well. It's important to brush and help your child with toothbrushing.

School readiness begins with health!

Tips for brushing your child's teeth and making it a good experience:

- **Choose a toothbrush made for children.** Look for toothbrushes with soft bristles and a small head made for brushing a child's teeth. Let your child pick a toothbrush that is a favorite color. Or let your child pick one that has a favorite character on the handle.
- **Use oral hygiene aids.** If it is hard for your child to hold a toothbrush, look for a toothbrush with a thick handle, or make the handle thicker by putting it inside a tennis ball. The toothbrush handle can also be strapped to your child's hand with a hair band or Velcro. Another way is to place a hand over the child's hand to guide the toothbrush as the child brushes.
- **Use fluoride toothpaste that your child likes.** Fluoride toothpaste comes in different flavors and colors. Find one that your child likes and feels good in his or her mouth.
- **Use the right amount of fluoride toothpaste.** An adult should always place toothpaste on the toothbrush. For children under age 3, use a smear (size of a grain of rice) of toothpaste. For children ages 3 to 6, use a pea-size amount of toothpaste. Encourage your child to spit and not swallow the remaining toothpaste.
- **Make toothbrushing fun.** Sing a song while brushing your child's teeth. Or count or say the alphabet while you brush your child's teeth. You can also tell a story, say a nursery rhyme, or make animal sounds while brushing.

Use a smear for children under age 3.

Use a pea-size amount for children ages 3 to 6.

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Healthy Habits for Happy Smiles

Visiting the Dental Clinic with Your Child

Children need to visit the dental clinic to keep their teeth and mouth healthy. If children have regular dental visits, the dentist and dental hygienist can take care of their teeth and find oral health problems early. Having regular dental visits also teaches children to value good oral health.

School readiness begins with health!

At the Dental Clinic, the Dental Team Will:

- Check your child's teeth and mouth.
- Talk to you about the best way to take care of your child's teeth. For example, brushing your child's teeth with fluoride toothpaste after breakfast and before bed.
- Share other ways to help prevent tooth decay (cavities). For example, putting fluoride varnish on children's teeth.

Tips for Visiting the Dental Clinic

- If your child asks what will happen at the dental clinic, give a simple answer. For example, say:
  - "They may count how many teeth you have."
  - "They may clean your teeth to make them shiny and bright!"
- If you don't like going to the dental clinic, don't tell your child. That might make your child worry about going, too.
- Set up a pretend dental chair. Pretend to be the dentist or dental hygienist. Look in your child's mouth and count her teeth; then talk to her about brushing her teeth.
- Read books or watch videos with your child about visiting the dental clinic. Don't use books or videos that have words like hurt, pain, shot, drill, afraid, or any other words that might scare your child.
- Let your child bring his favorite toy or blanket to the clinic.
- If you find out that your child will receive a small toy or new toothbrush at the end of the visit, remind your child of this reward.
- Plan a fun activity for after the clinic visit.

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