



Heidi J. Stark, D.D.S.  
Diplomate, American Board of Pediatric Dentistry  
Libby A. Johnson, D.D.S.  
Diplomate, American Board of Pediatric Dentistry  
Emily J. Egley, D.D.S.  
Diplomate, American Board of Pediatric Dentistry  
Katie J. Garcia, D.D.S.  
Diplomate, American Board of Pediatric Dentistry

## **Establishing a Healthy Mouth for Your Baby**

### **Dental Caries (Dental Cavities)**

- In order to have a cavity, three things are required: a tooth, bacteria, and food.
- Bacteria naturally found in the mouth metabolize the food to form an acid. The acid sits on the tooth's surface and creates a cavity.
- If left untreated, dental decay has been shown to cause pain and infection.

### **Diet Considerations**

- Never put your baby to bed with a bottle of breast milk or formula. This behavior increases your baby's risk for tooth decay.
- Avoid all juices (even 100 percent, all natural), pop, dried fruits, fruit snacks, gummy vitamins, and sticky candy.
- Sippy cups should only contain water or milk (not chocolate milk or juice).

### **Pregnancy and your Oral Health**

- When planning pregnancies, plan to visit your dentist as well.
- Maintaining good oral hygiene and a healthy diet is important to a healthy pregnancy.
- Research has shown untreated dental decay and periodontal disease increase the risk of complications during pregnancy such as preterm births and low birth weight.

### **Teething Recommendations**

- Let your baby chew on refrigerated teething rings or a wet washcloth.
- You can give your baby children's Tylenol (recommended dose based on weight) or children's ibuprofen (recommended dose based on weight after 6 months of age.)
- We do NOT recommend any over the counter teething gels. Teething gels are ineffective because the topical agent typically does not adhere to the gums where it is needed and baby ends up swallowing the gel instead. Cases of overdose have been reported.

### **Taking Care of Baby's Mouth**

- Prior to the first tooth, you can wipe baby's gums with a wet washcloth or burp cloth. It is not necessary but starts a routine that can easily lead to good brushing habits.
- Establish a brushing routine as soon as the first tooth erupts.
- Brush the teeth twice daily, once in the morning and before bedtime.
- Use an age-appropriate size toothbrush with tap water or training toothpaste.

- In order to brush the teeth, position your baby with his/her head on your lap, while seated on the floor so as to have the greatest access to the mouth and teeth. (Figure 1).
- Additionally if two adults are available, sit in a knee-to-knee position and recline the child while one adult holds the baby's hands and body. The second adult brushes the teeth with the baby's head on their lap. (Figure 2)
- If your baby is not cooperative when using a toothbrush, you can also use a wet washcloth, toothette, or finger brush to wipe the teeth clean.
- If your baby feeds during the night, it is recommended to clean the teeth with any of the above methods prior to putting your baby back to bed.
- A cavity in your mouth increases the risk of your baby to have cavities. The bacteria that cause dental decay are transmissible. Having dental decay is not 'genetic' but rather the bacteria is shared between mother and baby. Avoid sharing utensils and straws and cleaning pacifiers with your mouth. This will pass the bacteria from your mouth to your baby's mouth.

**Figure 1**



**Figure 2**



**Visit a pediatric dentist by age 1 and establish a dental home.**