

# CHILDREN'S DENTAL

## T I M E L I N E

**0-4  
months**  
(or before the first  
teeth come in)

Gently wipe the gums with a soft cloth or rubber finger toothbrush a few times a day for 2-3 seconds. Establishing a dental hygiene routine now makes it easier to maintain one as baby grows.

### **Avoid baby tooth decay**

Don't put your baby to sleep with a bottle of milk or juice, or coat a pacifier with sugar or honey. These sugary substances can feed bacteria, causing cavities or even tooth loss later in life.

**4-6  
months**  
(or after first  
teeth come in)

Continue to wipe the gums, while also cleaning teeth surfaces. From here on out, the oral health routine should occur at least twice a day, especially after eating and before sleep. It's important to remove cavity-causing plaque from the teeth as soon as they appear.

### **Baby's first dentist appointment**

The first trip to the dentist can be scheduled as soon as the first tooth comes in, but no later than baby's 1st birthday. Ask your dentist about the recommended exam schedule, typically every 6 months to once a year.

**1  
year**

Once teeth begin filling up the mouth, graduate to a soft child's toothbrush. Until spitting is possible, use fluoride-free toothpaste or the tiniest smear of regular fluoride toothpaste. Parents should continue to help with brushing at this stage.

**2-3  
years**

Help your child brush, while teaching how to spit out the non-fluoride toothpaste. Switch to a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste once spitting becomes consistent. Once teeth are fitting together snugly, start helping your child to floss, working up to at least once a day. All 20 primary (baby) teeth should have come in by age 3 – if not, this is a great time to make a trip to the dentist for evaluation.



### **Time to break the habit**

If your child is still using a pacifier or sucking his or her thumb after age 3, consult with your dentist.

3-6  
years

Adult help is still necessary at this stage. Let your child first brush independently while you supervise, then assist with any missed areas of the mouth if necessary. Continue to help with flossing as well. Ask your dentist about when to take first dental x-rays and if dental sealants would be beneficial.



### Make oral health fun

Try testing your child's skills with disclosing tablets, which use harmless dyes of various colors to expose any leftover plaque.

**Download a mobile app** – such as United Concordia's Chomper Chums – that features fun characters to motivate kids and teach proper technique. [UnitedConcordia.com/ChomperChums](http://UnitedConcordia.com/ChomperChums)

6-10  
years

While your child may be perfectly able to brush and floss independently, adult supervision is still important to ensure that it gets done – and that proper technique is consistently used. Your child will begin to lose his or her baby teeth.



### A note about braces

Even if your child's teeth appear to be straight, it's not a bad idea to consult an orthodontist. When the child is around age 7, this specialist can evaluate if there are any structural issues with the teeth, possibly recommending braces, a retainer or other procedures.

10+  
years

Ideally, your child should have a sound understanding of home dental care by now, but it's common to still have room to improve. By age 12 or 13, check with your dentist to confirm that all permanent teeth are in place, with the exception of the wisdom teeth. Your dentist should continue to monitor for wisdom teeth through the later teenage or early adulthood years, as they may need to be pulled and/or surgically removed from beneath the gum line.

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Sources:

- 1: Child Dental Health; MedlinePlus; March 2015
- 2: Your Child's Dental Health: A Timeline; Texas A&M University Health Science Center; March 2016
- 3: Dental Hygiene: How to Care for Your Baby's Teeth; familydoctor.org; June 2016
- 4: When to Start Flossing; Oral B; 2016
- 5: Take Care of Your Child's Teeth; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; September 2016
- 6: Eruption Charts; American Dental Association; 2016
- 7: The Life of a Tooth; The Academy of General Dentistry; 2016
- 8: Infant and Children's Oral Health; New York State Department of Health; 2005
- 9: Four Developmental Milestones in Your Child's Oral Health; Colgate

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