

Happy & Healthy Pediatrics

Pediatric, Adolescent, & Breastfeeding Medicine



Oral Health

The number-one dental problem among preschoolers is [tooth decay](#).

- One out of 10 two-year-olds already has one or more cavities
- By age three, 28% of children have one or more cavities
- By age five, nearly 50% of children have one or more cavities

Many parents assume that cavities in baby teeth don't matter, because they'll be lost anyway. But that's not true. Dental decay in baby teeth can negatively affect permanent teeth and lead to future dental problems.

Brushing:

For newborns, use a warm wet washcloth to wash the tongue and oral membranes 2-3 times/day to remove any stuck-on milk. Later in infancy, you can use a toothbrush that goes on your finger to wash the oral surfaces. Once a child develops teeth it is recommended to brush his or her teeth twice a day with a grain-of-rice sized segment of fluoride toothpaste. At age 3, the amount of fluoride toothpaste increases to the size of a pea. Fluoride free training toothpaste is never recommended.

Diet: Besides regular tooth brushing with the right amount of fluoride toothpaste, your child's diet plays a key role in their dental health. And, of course, sugar is the big villain. The longer and more frequently the teeth are exposed to sugar, the greater the risk of cavities. **"Sticky sugar" foods such as sticky caramel, toffee, gum, and dried fruit and fruit snacks—particularly when it stays in his mouth and bathes his teeth in sugar for hours—can do serious damage.** Make sure to always brush your child's teeth after a sugary food item. Using only straw cups and not sippy cups also helps. Limiting your child's juice consumption and getting rid of bottles at 1 year of age also has a great preventive impact. This is also why we don't recommend "gummy" vitamins. For infants, hold the infant when feeding—never prop a bottle on a pillow or other object. Do not allow infants to fall asleep with the bottle in their mouths. Also, avoid dipping pacifiers into any sweetened liquid, sugar or syrups.

Dentist: It is recommended to start seeing a dentist at age 2, as long as there are no concerns sooner. Children should be followed by a pediatric dentist every 6 months. It is really important to have a dental home. We strongly recommend a pediatric dentist, especially for those early visits. We find pediatric dentists are much better equipped at caring for young kids, especially being very aware of the child's emotional needs through the process. Please ask us for a referral if needed.

Fluoride: Fluoride plays a key role in preventing and controlling cavities. Fluoride helps reduce the loss of minerals from tooth enamel and promotes the replacement of minerals in dental enamel that has

been damaged by acids produced by bacteria in plaque. Regular and frequent exposure to small amounts of fluoride is the best way to protect the teeth against cavities. Your dentist will apply a fluoride varnish topically to the teeth at every visit which helps keep the teeth strong.

It is recommended that children between the ages of 6 months-12 years who live in Nassau or Suffolk County take a daily fluoride vitamin, which we prescribe. This is in addition to the fluoride toothpaste use discussed above. If we lived in NYC, our kids would be getting Fluoride in the water. But since there is no fluoride in the water in Nassau County and most of Suffolk County, all kids need to be supplemented. We see a definite increase in the number of cavities children get if they are not getting the fluoride supplementation. There is a lot of wrong information on Fluoride on social media-especially Facebook. Those “studies” quoted on Facebook usually involve 100’s to 1000’s of times the amount of fluoride ever given to a child and the research is usually done on rats and mice. (Any element on the periodic table is toxic in high quantities, including calcium. That doesn’t mean we don’t offer our kids a glass of milk or slice of cheese!) The amount of fluoride in the supplement is very small, but enough to make sure the child’s teeth and bones are strong and healthy. The dose is also adjusted based on the age of the child. Children who live in NYC get much more fluoride in their diet than our children do in NY State through the supplement. Please feel comfortable that what we are recommending is safe and appropriate. It is standard of care practice as per the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry.