

Your Child's First Dental Visit

Just as your child needs regular checkups with the pediatrician, regular visits with the dentist are necessary, too. Prepare your child for that first visit and the result may be the start of positive, lifelong dental care.

When should my child first see a dentist, and why?

The ideal time for a child to visit the dentist is six months after the child's first (primary) teeth erupt. This time frame is a perfect opportunity for the dentist to carefully examine the development of the child's mouth. Because dental problems often start early, the sooner the child visits the dentist, the better. To protect against problems, such as early childhood tooth decay, teething irritations, gum disease, and prolonged thumb- or pacifier-sucking, the dentist can provide or recommend special preventive care.

How do I prepare my child and myself for the visit?

Before the visit, ask the dentist about the procedures that will take place during the first appointment so there are no surprises. Plan a course of action for any possible reaction your child may have. Very young children may be fussy and not sit still. Others may become very frightened and



cry. Some children may not react negatively at all. Some may enjoy the appointment very much! There are a number of children's books about going to the dentist. Read these books with your child before his or her first visit to familiarize your child with what will happen at the dentist and help lessen any potential anxiety.

Try to make the upcoming appointment something to look forward to. Help your child understand what will happen during the visit. Also, be sure to bring any records of your child's complete medical history for his or her dental file.

What will happen during the first visit?

Often a first visit is simply a time to acquaint your child with the dentist and

the practice. If your child is frightened, uncomfortable, or uncooperative, you may need to reschedule the appointment. As a parent, you should try to remain patient and calm, reassuring your child that the visit is not scary or something about which to be afraid. Any anxiety on your part will be transferred to your child. Short, successive visits can build the child's trust in the dentist and the dental office and prove invaluable if your child needs to be treated later for any dental problem.

Children's appointments should be scheduled earlier in the day, when your child is alert and refreshed. For children younger than age 2 or 3, the parent may need to sit in the dental chair and hold the child during the examination.

If all goes well, the first visit often lasts between 15 and 30 minutes and may include any of the following, depending on the child's age:

- A gentle but thorough examination of the teeth, jaw, bite, gums, and oral tissues to monitor growth and development and observe any problem areas;
- A gentle cleaning, which includes polishing teeth and removing any plaque, tartar build-up, and stains;
- X-rays;
- A demonstration on how to properly care for the mouth and teeth at home;
- Nutritional counseling; and,
- An assessment of the need for fluoride.

The dentist should be able to answer any questions you have and try to make you and your child feel comfortable throughout the visit.

When should we schedule the next appointment?

Children, like adults, should see the dentist every six months. Some dentists may schedule interim visits for every three months when the child is very young to build the child's comfort and confidence levels or for treatment needs.

If you have questions about your child's dental needs, please talk to your dentist.