



Did You Know?

- Cavities are the most common chronic disease of children.
- The germs that cause cavities can be passed from parent to child so it's important to not share foods.
- Children with cavities in their primary (baby) teeth are more likely to have cavities in adult teeth.
- **Primary (Baby) teeth are very important** for nutrition, speech and your child's self esteem.
- Children with Autism/PDD may experience more dental problems due to oral sensitivities around the mouth, diet, and difficulty accessing dental care, difficulty brushing.



Prevent Early Childhood Cavities

- Don't share anything with your child that has been in your mouth such as spoons, foods or water bottles.
- Put only formula, breast milk or water in baby's bottle.
- Don't put baby to bed with a bottle or sippy cup.
- Don't let child walk around with a bottle or sippy cup with anything except water.
- Brush baby's teeth as soon as they come in.
- Take your child for a dental check-up by age 1.
- Ask the dentist or doctor about fluoride.
- Start flossing when two teeth touch each other.

Drinking From a Cup

Introduce the cup around 6 months and switch from bottle to cup by 1 year. Avoid using bottles and no-spill sippy cups. When children drink from them throughout the day, the sugar in the drink (anything but water) is in contact with the teeth longer and promotes cavities.

Healthy Snacks

- Snack on cut-up vegetables and fruits.
- Avoid sticky or sugary foods like fruit-roll-ups or crackers because they increase the time sugar is on the teeth and can cause cavities.

Check Teeth for Spots



- Lift your child's lip and look for chalky white or brown spots. Check upper front teeth, on the inside and outside. This is where early childhood cavities often start.
- If you see any spots, take your child to the dentist.

Introducing New Textures

Puffed or crunchy chips or crackers may be used to introduce new textures. Brush after crackers when possible since they stick to the teeth. Once your child readily accepts crunchy textures, use fruits, cheese, or other non-sticky snacks, when possible.

Visiting the Dentist

- Find a pediatric or general dentist who has experience with children with special needs.
- Inform the dentist's office of your child's special needs. Explain any sensitivities to touch or lights.
- Ask if the appointment can be made for the quietest time of the day.
- Ask for a private exam room if possible.
- Ask for any paperwork to be mailed so it can be completed ahead of time.
- Ask the dentist if you can schedule an "orientation" visit before the first appointment to get used to the office and meet the staff.
- Get a video or book on visiting the dentist and review several times with your child.
- Practice looking in your child's mouth with a disposable mouth mirror available at drug stores.
- Take your child's favorite music or toy.
- Get dental check-ups every 6 months. Children with disabilities may need more frequent visits.
- Ask your dentist about sealants and fluoride.

Oral Sensitivities & Toothbrushing

Children with Autism/PDD may have oral (mouth) sensitivity that makes toothbrushing difficult. When this occurs, it may be helpful to try the following steps:

- **Stabilize your child's head.** Sit child in a high chair or the corner of the couch. This will help stabilize child's head if they pull away. Avoid brushing with the child standing at the sink.
- **Start by touching the lips or just inside the mouth with the toothbrush** for a few seconds morning and night if the child is very sensitive. Praise after each touch. After a week, start toothbrushing as outlined below.
- **Break the toothbrushing into 6 small steps.** As early as age one, start using a tiny **pea-size** of fluoride toothpaste. **If your child objects to toothpaste, dip the brush once in ACT fluoride rinse before brushing.** Brush one area at a time as outlined below. Then take the brush out of the mouth. **Reinforce each step** by smiling, clapping and saying, "Good brushing." You may try bubbles or other reinforcement that your child likes. Ignore any negative behavior! For additional help, ask your occupational or behavioral therapist.
 1. **Brush the outside of the bottom back teeth.** Wiggle-jiggle the brush back and forth where the teeth and gums come together for a few seconds, then move the brush to the chewing surfaces and wiggle-jiggle. Then move to the **inside** to brush the tongue side of the teeth. Try singing while brushing. You may not be able to sing all of the song in the beginning. (Tune of *Row, Row, Row Your Boat*.)

*Brush, brush, brush your teeth. Brush them everyday.
That's the way we will fight Mr. Tooth Decay.*
 2. **Brush the bottom front teeth outside and inside in the same manner while singing.**
 3. **Brush the bottom back teeth on the other side.**
 4. **Brush the top back teeth on one side.**
 5. **Brush the top front teeth outside and inside.**
 6. **Brush the top back teeth on the other side.**
- **Brush morning and night even if only for a few seconds.** Some brushing is better than none. Don't give up. Once a routine is established, brushing will get easier.

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Use only a pea-sized amount of toothpaste.

- **Try a 2-sided toothbrush to reduce brushing time.** Special brushes can brush the inside and the outside of the teeth at the same time. To use them, press the brush on the chewing surface of the teeth so that the bristles reach the gums and "hug" the sides of the teeth. Wiggle the brush back and forth. Brush in the 6 areas as described. They can be ordered from:
 - *Collis Curve Toothbrush:* www.colliscurve.com
 - *Remedent:* www.famcare2000.com
 - *Twinbrush:* www.specializedcare.com
- **Social Stories may help.** Take pictures of you and your child before, during and after brushing (smiling) and put the pictures together with a brief story about brushing. Read the story everyday. A social story can also be made about your child's trip to the dentist.
- **Make toothbrushing a routine.** If you are using picture schedules, add a picture of toothbrushing as part of the morning and bedtime routine.
- **Supervise toothbrushing for children.** A good rule is to brush your child's teeth until she can tie her shoes. Some children with disabilities will continue to need partial or total assistance.
- **Once two teeth touch and your child accepts brushing, start flossing.** Use the same step-by-step approach as brushing. Try floss holders that are available at drug stores.

Resources

For help in finding a dentist, contact:

Rady Children's Customer Care and Referral Service
at 1-800-788-9029

Exceptional Family Resource Center at
1-800-281-8252.

To make an appointment for your child with autism contact Rady Children's Pediatric Dental Clinic at 858-966-4094 (*MediCal/DentiCal, Military, Healthy Families-Delta Dental, & some private insurances*).

For Parent-to-Parent Support, contact:

Exceptional Family Resource Center at
1-800-281-8252 and ask about Dental PALS (Parents Actively Listening for Support) Program."