



## Did You Know?

- Cavities are the most common chronic disease of childhood.
- The germs that cause cavities can be passed from parent to child so it's important not to share foods.
- Children with cavities in their primary (baby) teeth are more likely to have cavities in adult teeth.
- **Primary 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, diet, difficulty brushing and difficulty accessing dental care.



## Prevent Early Childhood Cavities

- Don't share anything with your child that has been in your mouth such as spoons, foods or water bottles.
- Don't let child walk around with a bottle or sippy cup with anything except water.
- Brush your child'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.

## Healthy Snacks and Drinks

- Snack on cut-up vegetables, fruits, and low-fat cheese.
- 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.
- Offer only water to drink between meals.

## 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 dentist who has experience with children with autism.
- 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 & Tooth Brushing

Children with autism/PDD may have 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. Gradually start brushing one area of the mouth at a time increasing as time goes on.
- **Use a small smear of fluoride toothpaste** as soon as the first tooth comes in. Increase to a tiny pea-size of fluoride toothpaste when he is able to spit the toothpaste out. If your child objects to toothpaste, dip the brush once in a fluoride rinse, such as ACT, before brushing.
- **Reinforce small successes** 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.
- **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.

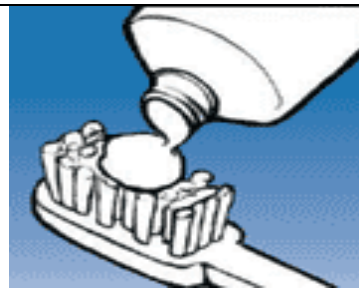
## Resources

### For help in finding a dentist, contact:

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

**For an In-Home Visit by the Anderson Dental Staff** contact your Service Coordinator at the San Diego Regional 858-576-2996

**For Parent-to-Parent Support,** contact: Exceptional Family Resource Center at 1-800-281-8252



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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.

They can be ordered from:

- *Collis Curve Toothbrush:*  
[www.colliscurve.com](http://www.colliscurve.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 tooth brushing a routine.** If you are using picture schedules, add a picture of tooth brushing as part of the morning and bedtime routine.
- **Supervise tooth brushing 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.

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