



SADA

THE SOUTH AFRICAN
DENTAL ASSOCIATION

*Patient Education
Information
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**Oral Health
and
Children**

Oral health and children

Children need to understand the importance of good oral care as early as possible. Poor oral health can negatively affect how a young mouth develops. It can also affect a child's confidence, social skills as well as potential for success later in life.

Oral health is, therefore, essential to a child's general health and well-being.

How to clean a baby's mouth

It is important to begin caring for a child's mouth as soon as they are born.

A newborn may not have any teeth, however, the gums will protect the bone and roots of their teeth when they do.

Wipe the gums with a clean, moist gauze pad or washcloth, especially after feedings and before bedtime.

Bottle-feeding tips and pacifiers

- Place only breast milk, formula, milk, or water in bottles.
- Refrain from adding sugar to the milk or filling the bottles with sugary drinks such as sugar water, fruit juice and soft drinks.
- Babies should finish their bedtime and naptime bottles before going to bed. Try and avoid letting babies sleep with a feeding bottle in their mouths.
- Sucking on a pacifier or a thumb for too long affects the development of your child's teeth and mouth. Discourage thumb-sucking and extended use of the pacifier, and never dip the pacifier in sugar or honey.
- Wean your child off their pacifier by the age of two-and-a-half years.

First tooth, first birthday milestones

- Clean the mouth twice a day when the first baby tooth starts to come in. It is especially important to clean your baby's teeth before bedtime. Smear a small amount of fluoride toothpaste (about the size of a grain of rice) on their toothbrushes.
- Regular dental check-ups are important to keep your child's teeth and gums healthy. Take your baby to the dentist after the first tooth comes in and no later than his or her first birthday.
- Encourage drinking from a cup by their first birthday. An open cup will help your baby learn to sip and is better for your baby's teeth.

Growing up

- Make sure children brush for two minutes, twice a day: children between the ages of 3 and 6 should use a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste, younger children need just a smear. Brushing teeth for two minutes, twice daily is an essential skill for a child's long-term oral and overall health.
- Teach the correct brushing technique: as they grow older, teach children how to brush their teeth properly – in circular motions – and supervise them as they learn to do it more independently. Remind them to brush all surfaces of their teeth, including the outside, inside, and chewing surfaces.
- Promote healthy low-sugar diets: nutrition and oral health are closely related. Sugar, in particular, has a direct impact on oral health. Limit your child's intake of sugary snacks and drinks. Having sugar throughout the day increases the risk of developing tooth decay.