



Brushing Your Child's Teeth

Teaching your child to brush is a task that many parents have dreaded at one time or another. Having your child brush, however, is extremely important because it establishes good oral habits that last a lifetime.

Start Early

The key to establishing good brushing habits is starting an oral care program early. In fact, we suggest that you begin cleaning your baby's mouth the first few days after birth. After each meal take a wet washcloth and wipe your baby's gums. This accomplishes three things:

1. It removes plaque that accumulates on the gums. Plaque is a sticky substance containing mucus, food debris, and bacteria. Removing plaque prevents bacteria from building up on your child's gums.
2. It gets your child accustomed to having a clean, plaque-free mouth. When your child is accustomed to a clean, plaque-free mouth, they will usually take steps, including brushing, to keep this clean feeling.
3. It gets your child accustomed to you "meddling" in their mouth. When your child becomes accustomed to you "meddling" in their mouth, it becomes easier for you to brush their teeth later. It also makes it easier for the dentist to examine and work in their mouths at a later date.

The First Baby Teeth

The baby's first teeth appear, on average, about six months after birth. Parents may notice excessive salivation and the child may become irritable while these first teeth are coming in. When teeth appear, use a cotton swab daily to gently wipe the teeth and remove plaque. If your child has not grown up tolerating you "meddling in their mouth" you may have a much tougher problem. If your child is two years of age and their teeth have not been brushed and inspected by you, in all probability, plaque has not been sufficiently removed.

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Despite the protests and the fight your child may give you, it is extremely important that you brush their teeth. Parents in fact, are responsible for making sure their children's teeth are clean until the child reaches five to six years of age! This is because, on average, younger children do not have the manual dexterity required to brush teeth effectively.

Why should you go to great lengths to brush your child's teeth? The most important reason is that tooth decay occurs faster in children than in adults. By brushing your child's teeth, you remove the plaque and bacteria which are responsible for this tooth decay. Another reason to help your child learn to brush is that this helps them develop a crucial habit which will last a lifetime.

Make It Fun !

The key to getting your child to brush is to make it fun. Start your program today and look for fun ways to engage your children in the activity. Make it seem as if brushing is a fun thing to do rather than a chore which must be done. One method that is fun and effective is allowing your children to brush your teeth. You should laugh a lot and make it a fun activity. Then allow them to "brush" their own teeth. Finish by brushing your child's teeth. You may want to include older siblings in the activity.

Alternatively, have your child brush their favorite doll's teeth before you brush theirs. Remember always allow them to "brush" their own teeth and then follow up by brushing their teeth correctly.

Use only a pea-size amount of toothpaste on their toothbrush as larger amounts tend to create excessive foam making it more difficult for your child to brush. Make sure that your child gets in the habit of spitting out the toothpaste. Swallowing toothpaste on a consistent basis can lead to a condition known as fluorosis, in which spots may appear on your child's teeth. Be careful of the toothpaste you use. Almost all toothpastes contain harsh flavorings that adults barely notice, but that can sting young mouths. This is one of the reasons children do not like to brush.

If your child still refuses to engage in these toothbrushing games, make toothbrushing appear as a fun activity they are missing out on. Have mom and dad go up to the bathroom eager to brush. Laugh a lot and make a lot of noise. Soon your child will realize that they are missing out on something fun and will want to join in.