



***Make  
Smiles  
Last a  
Lifetime***

***Oral Care During Early Childhood***



# Welcome, Educator!

Good oral health is an important part of overall health, and bright, healthy smiles begin in childhood. That's why **Colgate Bright Smiles Bright Futures®** (BSBF) has been a part of early education programs since 1991. By helping educators like you promote good oral care, BSBF encourages children and their families to start building bright smiles through healthy habits.

In this guide, you'll find resources that will help you and the families and communities you serve support children's health, development, and school readiness. These materials:

- Teach the importance of oral health.
- Offer guidance on oral care in early childhood.
- Help children and families establish healthy habits like toothbrushing, flossing, choosing healthy foods, and getting regular and recommended healthcare.

Use these materials in your classroom, or photocopy and share them with caregivers to engage families, extend learning at home, and introduce children to the habits that lead to lifelong bright smiles and oral health.



# How to Care for Baby Teeth

**Baby (primary) teeth are a child's first set of teeth. These teeth help children speak and eat, and save space for permanent teeth. Here's why baby teeth are important and how caregivers can keep them healthy.**



## What Do Baby Teeth Do?

- Help children form sounds and words.
- Allow children to chew solid foods.
- Save space for adult teeth and guide them into place.
- Build healthy, bright smiles children can feel confident about.

Children usually have 20 baby teeth by age two—ten on top and ten on the bottom. As permanent teeth grow in the roots of baby teeth dissolve, and baby teeth loosen and fall out.

**TIP**

**Adults are oral health role models. Practice good oral care habits and children will, too.**

## Birth to 8 months

### First baby teeth appear.

Caregivers should clean gums with a soft, damp towel once a day, brush teeth with fluoride toothpaste and a soft toothbrush, and floss between teeth that touch. Regularly check teeth and gums for white spots or discoloration, and visit your child's dentist if you see any.

## Ages 2-3

### All baby teeth grow in.

Children can start brushing their own teeth with caregiver supervision. Caregivers should continue to floss children's teeth for them once a day.

## Age 6

### Six-year molars appear.

These first permanent teeth grow in at the back of the mouth behind baby teeth, but do not replace them. Children should take extra care to brush them on all sides.

## Age 6 and older

### Permanent teeth replace baby teeth.

Caregivers should continue to floss children's teeth and supervise toothbrushing until age 8.

# Brush for Bright Smiles

**Brushing teeth with fluoride toothpaste removes plaque that can lead to tooth decay. Help children brush their teeth at least twice a day, especially after breakfast and before bed.**

## What is Fluoride?

Regular brushing with fluoride toothpaste removes plaque and bacteria that can cause cavities. It also keeps breath fresh and smiles bright.

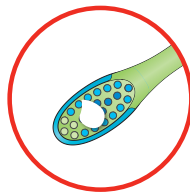
Fluoride is a natural element. When applied to teeth, it combines with the tooth's enamel to strengthen, or *remineralize* it. Remineralization builds up the tooth enamel that plaque may have eaten away (demineralized).

Using fluoride is one of the most effective and least expensive ways to help prevent tooth decay in children and adults. Check toothpaste ingredients to make sure fluoride is listed. If you have access to fluoridated tap water, drink it daily. It is also safe to mix fluoridated tap water with infant formula.

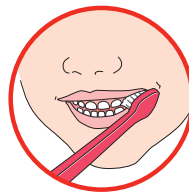
## How to Brush



Start with a soft-bristled children's toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste.



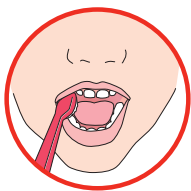
Squeeze out a smear of toothpaste. **For children younger than 3, use a pea-sized amount.**



Place the brush against the outer gum line at an angle. Wiggle back and forth on each tooth.



Place toothbrush against insides of teeth and wiggle.



Brush the chewing surfaces of each tooth.



Use the tip of the brush to brush behind each top and bottom front tooth.



Brush the tongue.



Check—did you brush for two minutes?



**Replace toothbrushes every three months or if they get worn, chewed, or splayed. Remind children and family members not to share them.**

# Floss for Bright Smiles

**Flossing cleans the places where toothbrushes can't reach: between teeth and around the gumline. Prevent plaque buildup and tooth decay by flossing children's teeth once a day.**

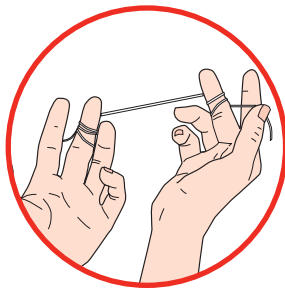


## Why Floss?

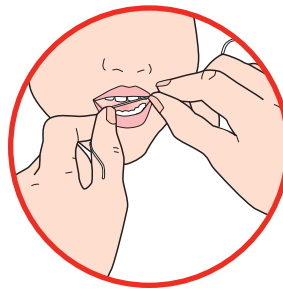
Flossing is the best way to clear away food particles and bacteria that get caught between teeth. But, young children don't yet have the motor skills to floss. An adult should floss children's teeth for them until they are able to do it themselves, usually around age eight.

## How to Floss for a Child

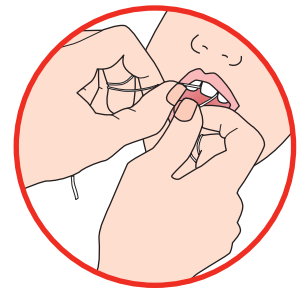
Begin flossing children's teeth in babyhood, as soon as two teeth are touching.



**Take about 18 inches of dental floss. Wrap one end around each middle finger.**



**With thumbs and index fingers as guides, gently slide the floss between two teeth using a saw-like motion.**



**At the gum line, pull floss tight so that it forms a C-shape against one tooth. Move it up and down against the side of the tooth.**

Pull the floss in the other direction and do it again.

Floss between all teeth that touch. Be sure to floss both sides of back teeth.



**Flossing for a child takes practice and may require more than one adult. A dentist or dental hygienist can show you how to do it and teach you how to keep a child's head still during flossing.**

# Dental Checkups for Children

**Visiting a dental office regularly is a habit that should start early. Caregivers should take children to their first dental checkup as soon as teeth begin to appear, and return twice a year.**

## When To Go

A child's first dental checkup should happen when their first baby tooth comes in—around age six months—and no later than their first birthday. Regular dental checkups keep teeth and gums healthy.

Some medical providers and health professionals can also apply fluoride varnish during medical visits for infants age 8 months and older. Fluoride treatments protect and strengthen teeth. After fluoride treatments, avoid brushing teeth for 4-6 hours.

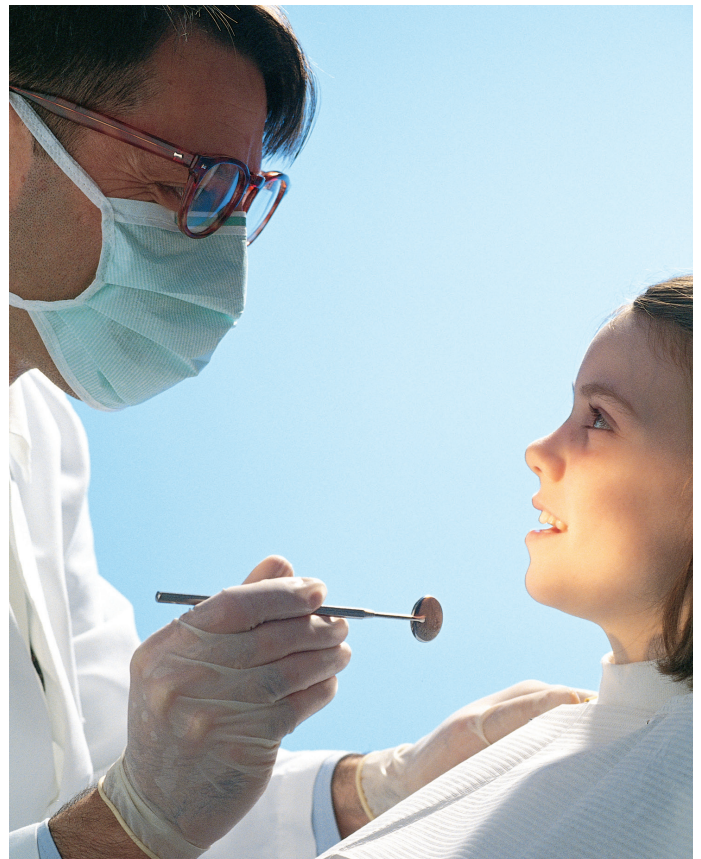
## What Happens at a Dental Visit?

### A dentist or dental hygienist will

- Check, clean, polish, and floss teeth
- Apply fluoride
- Take X-rays in some cases
- Offer guidance and answer your questions

### Caregivers may

- Ask the dentist or dental hygienist questions
- Schedule a child's next appointment



### TIP

**Dental checkups can be a great experience for children. Keep a positive attitude when discussing or answering questions about the dental office.**



# Eat for Healthy Teeth

**Nutrition and oral care go hand-in-hand. Choosing healthy foods and understanding how to prevent plaque attacks can help you keep children's teeth safe, strong, and healthy.**



## What's a Plaque Attack?

- Plaque is a sticky film that forms on teeth. It is made of bacteria that live in the mouth.
- When we eat or drink, plaque mixes with sugar in foods and creates acid.
- Acid dissolves the enamel on the outsides of teeth.
- This is called tooth decay and is how cavities start.
- Plaque attacks last for up to 30 minutes.

Sugary foods cause plaque attacks the fastest, and sticky foods can attach to teeth making plaque attacks last longer. Limit sweet and sticky foods, and brush teeth in the morning, at night, and after snacking.

## Watch Out For Sneaky Sugar

Sugars hide in foods like raisins, granola bars, and sweetened cereals. Check food labels for ingredients that end in “-ose” such as fructose, glucose, and lactose, which are different types of sugar.



Snack on these instead.



**Plaque attacks happen every time you eat. Make sure to limit the *amount* of sugary foods children eat, as well as *how often* they eat them.**

# How to Keep Smiles Safe

**Most dental injuries and emergencies are preventable, but in case they occur it's important to know how to act. Here's what to do.**



## Do's and Don'ts

Tooth and mouth injuries can happen at school, on the playground, in the car, and while playing sports. To prevent falls, trips, and bumps make sure that children

### Do

- Hold onto handrails
- Wear protective sports gear
- Use booster seats and seatbelts
- Walk behind playground equipment that's in use

### Don't

- Stand on chairs, desks, or swings
- Push and shove
- Chew on nutshells, pencils, or ice
- Run around swimming pools or dive in shallow water

## If a child has a...

## Then...

<b>Toothache</b>	Rinse their mouth with warm water and use floss to remove any trapped food. Apply ice or a compress, then visit the dental office.
<b>Object stuck between teeth</b>	Remove it with dental floss. If you can't get it out, see a dentist or dental hygienist.
<b>Knocked-out tooth</b>	Put the tooth in water or milk and go to the dental office right away. Do not clean the tooth or try to put it back.
<b>Broken tooth</b>	Clean and apply ice or a compress. Keep any pieces of the tooth you can find, and go to the dental office right away.
<b>Bitten lip or tongue</b>	Apply cold and pressure to swelling. Call your child's doctor or dentist if there's a lot of bleeding.
<b>Loose permanent tooth</b>	Visit the dental office right away.

### TIP

**If an injury occurs, stay calm. Reassure the child, apply pressure to stop or control bleeding, and go to the dental office as soon as you can. For emergencies, call 9-1-1 or go to the emergency room (ER).**