

Exploring

children's health and wellness

Capital District
Child Care Council

a tipsheet for parents and caregivers of children

8 Tips for a Beautiful Smile

Brushing teeth and using fluoride is the key to healthy teeth and gums. Parents sometimes worry about young children swallowing fluoride toothpaste but in fact consuming fluoride in small amounts may be beneficial. Fluoride has been shown to strengthen children's teeth before they even erupt and can make their teeth less prone to cavities in the future. It is the key cavity-preventing ingredient in toothpaste and can be found in most public water systems in the United States. Drinking fluorinated water and using fluoride toothpaste are important ways to get topical fluoride onto children's teeth. Some things to consider in regards to oral care:

- 1. When to start:** Children should begin brushing with the eruption of the very first tooth. This will help ensure healthy permanent teeth.
- 2. Picking the right toothbrush:** A soft tooth brush is recommended, as it will not harm gums and will be comfortable to use. Be sure the brush is small enough to get to hard to reach areas.
- 3. Picking the right toothpaste:** The American Dental Association suggests that children use fluoride toothpaste, as it helps strengthen tooth enamel. Avoid tartar control and whitening toothpaste, especially with children as it can sand away the tooth structure.
- 4. How much toothpaste:** Infants should use no more than a rice size amount and toddlers should have a pea size amount of toothpaste. Young children will need assistance to spit into a cup or sink. Repeated swallowing of a large amount of toothpaste can be harmful, however; swallowing small amounts may be beneficial.
- 5. How often to brush:** Twice a day but no more than 3 times per day. Excessive brushing may weaken tooth enamel and damage gums.

- 6. How long to brush:** It is recommended that children brush their teeth for approximately 2 minutes, long enough to sing the ABC song twice. Brush with a light hand inside, outside, top and bottom especially where the gums and teeth meet. Brushing and flossing is the only way to remove plaque, which is a layer of germs that grow on teeth and gums. If not removed properly, plaque can cause cavities and gum disease. Rinsing alone will not remove it.
- 7. When to start flossing:** It is recommended that children begin flossing, with parental assistance, when their teeth come in close contact with one another. Typically this is about 2 ½ years of age.
- 8. How to care for and store toothbrushes:** It is recommended that toothbrushes are rinsed after each use and left to air dry with brush side up in a storage cup or holder. If multiple brushes are stored in one area, to avoid the spread of germs, do not allow brushes to touch. Replace toothbrushes every 3 to 4 months or if the bristles appear to be frayed or damaged.

