

Welcome to *The Tooth Book!*

Did you know that how well you care for your child's teeth will affect his or her ability to learn and grow up healthy? Practicing good oral health care in your family will help protect your child's bright smile and future.

Use this guide to learn about oral health—taking care of your child's teeth from birth to kindergarten and beyond.

Birth-18 months?

Learn about:

- Infant mouth and gums
- “Teething” babies
- Baby’s first teeth
- Tooth decay
- Dental visits



18 months to 3 years?

Learn about:

- Good eating habits
- Sugary foods
- Brushing teeth



Is Your Child . . .



3 to 5 years?

Learn about:

- Protecting your child’s teeth when you’re away
- Pacifiers and thumbsucking
- Parent checklist

5 to 18 years?

Learn about:

- Role modeling
- Dental visits
- Teeth that come out

Baby (Birth-18 months)

Caring For Your Baby's Mouth and Gums

Germs can form easily in a baby's mouth (even before the first teeth come in).

1. Start cleaning your baby's mouth a few days after birth.
2. Wipe your baby's gums with a clean damp washcloth after every feeding.

Caring For Your "Teething" Baby

As early as six months your baby may experience sore or tender gums.

1. Gently rub your child's gums with a clean finger, a small cool spoon, or a wet gauze pad.
2. Give your baby a clean teething ring to chew on.

Caring For Your Baby's First Teeth

The front teeth usually come in first. They may start coming in about six months after birth. Most children have 20 baby ("primary") teeth by age three.

1. Brush your child's teeth (even if it's only one tooth!) with a soft toothbrush two times a day.
2. Use a simple, gentle, short, back-and-forth brushing motion.



Baby (Birth-18 months)

Preventing Tooth Decay

Sweetened liquids contain sugar, which will pool around your baby's teeth during sleep. This is not good because sugar can mix with germs in your baby's mouth and cause tooth decay. If sugar mixes with germs for a long period of time, it will form an acid that eats holes in your baby's teeth.

1. Do not allow your child to fall asleep with a bottle containing breast milk, formula, fruit juices, or other sugary liquids.
2. To soothe your child at bedtime, try soft music.
3. Do not dip a pacifier in sweetened foods (sugar, honey, or syrup) and let your child suck on it.
4. When you begin offering your child foods other than formula or breast milk, limit how often you serve sugary foods.



Baby (Birth-18 months)

Taking Your Child to the Dentist

Your child should visit a dentist by the time he or she reaches one year of age.

1. Prepare your child to visit the dentist by playing a game of “dentist” or reading books about the dentist.
2. Consider bringing your child along when an older sibling visits the dentist, and talk to him or her about the experience.

Happy 1st Birthday!



Toddler (18 months-3 years)

Establishing Good Eating Habits

It's important to establish good eating habits when your child is young.

1. For meals and snacks, choose foods from the five main food groups: fruits, vegetables, meat, grain products, and dairy products.
2. Plan to serve non-sugary snacks as part of the daily food plan.
3. Limit sugary foods to once or twice per day. *It's not **how much** sugar your child eats but **how often** that matters.*
4. If you decide to serve sugary foods and drinks, do so at regularly scheduled mealtimes and not as snacks between meals.
5. Encourage your child to drink lots of water. Water does not contain sugar, and it will satisfy thirst.
6. Be a role model for your child—ask your family to be role models too.

Healthy Snacks

Sugary Snacks

Sugary Drinks

Vegetables	Chocolate	Sugared Soda
Low-Fat Yogurt	Cookies and Cake	Fruit Drinks
Fruits	Ice Cream	Juices
Low-Fat Cheese	Sweets	Kool Aid
Peanut Butter	Fruit Chews	



Toddler (18 months-3 years)

Brushing Your Child's Teeth

Brushing your child's teeth with fluoride toothpaste will prevent tooth decay. Fluoride is a substance in toothpaste that can strengthen the outer layer of a tooth, called the enamel.

1. Brush your child's teeth twice per day, especially before going to bed at night.
2. Use a child-sized toothbrush with soft bristles.
3. Around age two, brush your child's teeth with a tiny "smear-sized" amount of toothpaste on the brush.
4. Teach your child to spit out the toothpaste.
5. Be a role model for your child by brushing your teeth at the same time.



Toddler (18 months-3 years)

Teaching Your Child to Brush

Prepare for teaching your child to brush by choosing a child-sized toothbrush with soft bristles. Consider choosing a bright-colored toothbrush with a pattern to encourage brushing. Flavored toothpaste also encourages brushing.

1. Help your child learn to brush using a gentle, short, back-and-forth motion.
2. Encourage your child with positive feedback such as, "Good job!" or "What a good tooth-brusher you are!"
3. Be a role model by brushing your own teeth at the same time as your child.
4. You will have to help your child "finish up" until he or she is older and can do a good job on their own. Children who can tie their shoes may be ready to brush on their own.



Preschooler (3-5 years)

Protecting Your Child When You're Away

Your child's teeth are important for eating, talking, and learning. You can help protect your child's teeth when away from home by asking some important questions.

1. If your child attends programs like Head Start or other care and education programs, find out if the program encourages brushing.
Ask: Do you brush my child's teeth during the day or help him or her to brush?
2. Find out what meals and snacks caregivers provide to your child during the day. Make sure your child is offered healthy foods when away from home.
Ask: What does my child eat during the day?
Ask: How often is my child eating sugary foods?
3. Whether traveling in a car or bus, your child should always sit in a child safety seat the right size for his or her age. Without this, your child may hurt his or her face, mouth, or teeth.
Ask: When traveling in a car or bus with others, is my child in a safety seat that is the right size for his or her age?



Preschooler (3-5 years)

Weaning Your Child From the Pacifier

1. Do not use pacifiers or encourage thumbsucking, which can affect the placement of your child's permanent (adult) teeth.
2. Have a plan for helping your child give up thumbsucking or the pacifier.

Making Sure You've Got It Covered

Use this checklist to make sure you're doing everything you can to protect your preschooler's bright smile.

✓ Do you...

- ___ Replace your child's toothbrush every 3-4 months and after an illness?
- ___ Make sure your child brushes twice per day, especially before bedtime?
- ___ Use a tiny (smear-sized) amount of fluoride toothpaste on your child's brush?
- ___ Have your child spit out toothpaste instead of swallow it?
- ___ Make sure your child visits the dentist once per year or as often as the dentist recommends?
- ___ Ask your dentist questions you have about caring for your child's teeth?
- ___ Call your dentist if one of your child's baby teeth is accidentally knocked out?
- ___ Make sure your child eats no more than 1-2 sugary snacks per day?
- ___ Have a plan for helping your child give up thumbsucking or the pacifier?



School-aged (5-18 years)

Helping Your Child Continue to Practice Good Oral Health Care

As a parent, you are the most important role model for your child, so consider making oral health care a family practice at your house.

1. Encourage your child to drink milk, water, and some juice instead of soda or sweetened beverages.
2. Remember, it's how often your child eats sugary foods that matters.
3. Have your child brush his or her teeth twice per day and after sugary snacks.
4. Encourage your child to brush for two minutes each time he or she brushes.
5. Help your child brush or check their teeth after brushing until he or she does a good job on their own.
6. Have your child floss twice per week.
7. Take your child to the dentist once per year or as often as the dentist recommends.
8. Ask your dentist any questions you may have about your child's teeth and oral hygiene.



School-aged (5-18 years)

Visiting the Dentist

By age four or five, your child's dentist will have given your child a fluoride treatment to strengthen his or her teeth. The dentist will continue to take x-rays of your child's teeth and give your child fluoride treatments during his or her school years.

1. Make sure your child visits the dentist each year or as often as the dentist recommends.
2. Follow the dentist's instructions.
3. Make sure to ask your dentist any questions you have about your child's teeth and oral health care.

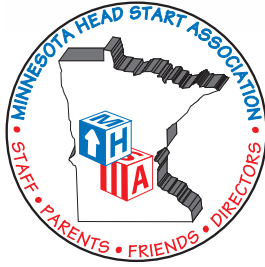
Taking Care of a Tooth That Accidentally Comes Out

As you know, children play hard! If by accident one of your child's permanent (not baby) teeth are knocked out, follow these steps.

1. Put the tooth back in its socket; or
2. Put it in milk or salt water; or
3. Hold it in your mouth until you can put it in milk or water.
4. See your dentist right away!

(Baby teeth should not be replaced. If your child's baby tooth is knocked out, save it and call your dentist.)





The Tooth Book was produced by the Minnesota Head Start Association (MHSA), and Parents In Community Action, Inc. (PICA) in partnership with Delta Dental Plan of Minnesota.



Acknowledgements: The Tooth Book was designed and produced by ABZORB Design Inc., printed by Ambassador Press Inc., and written and edited by Elizabeth Marie Dorn with contributions from the Oral Health Advisory Committee of MHSA, Children's Dental Services, and Christopher Okunseri, BDS, MSc. Translation services were provided by members of the PICA Cross Cultural Team: Yusuf Abdurahman (Somali), KaYeng Vang (Hmong), and Reina Y. Ramirez (Spanish).