

General Dental Health Guidance for Parents and Caregivers

As partners, you, your child's dentist, and doctor can make sure your child with special needs has the best dental health possible. Together you can make a difference!

Scheduling a dental appointment

All children should have their first visit to a dentist 6 months after the first tooth comes into the mouth, or by 1 year of age (whichever comes first).

How to find a dentist for your child:

- Your child's doctor, nurse, or therapist (speech, occupational, physical, or other)
- A Parent to Parent group
- Your Local Health Department/District or Dental Society

Some people find it helpful to know what to say when calling the dental office to schedule an appointment. Here are some ideas.

Hi, my name is _____

I am calling to schedule an appointment for my child _____

My child has special medical needs. My child has _____

Are you the person I should speak with about my child's needs, or is there someone else available in your office I can speak with?

My child does best when _____

My child is afraid of _____

My child will feel more comfortable in your office if _____

For example: Can I be with my child in the dental treatment room?

Ask questions related to your child's specific physical circumstances. For example: Are there stairs? Is there an elevator? Is parking next to or inside the building?

In the past, my child had a successful dental visit when _____

In the past, my child had a hard time at the dentist when _____

Thank you.

Before dental appointment

- If you are fearful or anxious at the dentist, have a family member or friend take your child to the dentist appointment.
- Talk to your child about going to the dentist. Use words your child will understand and a positive or neutral tone of voice. Avoid using terms like "shot" and "drill." Sometimes pictures or books help to explain what will happen.
- Offer suggestions to the dental office to help create a successful visit. Be clear and specific about what will help your child at the appointment. Share past dental experiences, positive and negative ones, with the office staff.
- Make the dental appointment for a time of day that is best for your child, if possible.
- Tell the dental office the name of your child's doctor's office or clinic.
- Let the dental office know that it may take longer to treat your child.
- If your child is in a wheelchair, let dental office know if your child can be treated in the wheelchair.
- If you need physical help getting your child from the car into the dental office or from a wheelchair into the dental chair, ask the dental office if they can help move your child.
- Ask the dentist if you can bring your child to see the dental office before the date of the dental appointment.
- If your child requires pre-medication before a dental visit, discuss with the dentist.
- If your child has already had many dental and medical surgeries and treatments, extra reassurance may be needed.

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Day of dental appointment

- Bring the list of all medicines your child takes.
- Inform the dental staff of the most successful way to talk or communicate with your child.
- Tell the dental office things your child might do and the best way to deal with how he or she may act. Suggest things that make your child feel good. Tell the dental office your child may want to hold your hand or a stuffed animal.
- Ask for help about different teeth cleaning ideas that will make taking care of your child's teeth at home easier.
- A power brush may be too stimulating for some children. Explore different type toothbrushes and toothpastes. There are toothpastes that contain Sodium Lauryl Sulfate; this makes foam that some children do not like.
- Establish a routine such as the use of the same positioning, timing, and location for daily oral hygiene activities.
- Bring a list of any questions you may have about your child's teeth.
- Tell the dentist you would like to talk about any treatment before it is done.
- Let the dental office know if your child is more sensitive than others to bright lights, sounds, being touched or other stimuli.
- Ask whom you should call, or where you should go, if your child has a dental problem and the dental office is closed.
- If your child is anxious about dental visits, inform the dental staff of the most successful way to talk with your child.
- Tell dental staff if your child has an allergy to latex or any other material.
- If your child uses a bronchodilator or EPI pen, bring these to dentist!

Keeping teeth and gums healthy

- Ask the dentist and dental hygienist all questions you have to so that together you can keep your child's teeth and gums healthy.
- Ask your doctor or nurse for prescriptions without sugar to help prevent tooth decay (also called "cavities"). Use "over-the-counter" medicines that do not have added sugar.
- Encourage your child to rinse with water after taking medications that may cause "dry mouth." A dry mouth can make it easier for your child to get tooth decay.
- Know what is normal in your child's mouth. Lift the lips away from the teeth for a better view of your child's teeth and gums. Look often.
- Follow a daily plan to take care of your child's teeth: Brush teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste. Have your child drink fluoridated water. Use any aids recommended by the dentist or hygienist to keep teeth and mouth clean.
- Avoid offering your child sugary snacks and drinks (juices, pop) and avoid using them as rewards. Look at labels on food products for words ending in "ose," such as "fructose" and "sucrose" and limit their use.
- Do not share utensils, cups, and toothbrushes with your child to avoid passing the bacteria which can cause tooth decay. If your child uses a pacifier, do not dip the pacifier in honey or sugar, and only clean with water.
- Do not serve juice in sip cups, just in open cups. If you need to put a child to bed with a bottle, fill it only with water.
- If your child knocks a tooth out, attempt to place the tooth immediately back into the socket and seek professional dental care. If you are unable to replace the tooth, put it in cold milk and proceed immediately to the dentist.
- Use seat belts, stair gates, bike helmets, and mouth guards to prevent injury to the teeth and face.
- Bring your child to the dentist for preventive visits as recommended based on your child's risk for getting tooth decay. Ask the dentist for dental "sealants" and fluoride treatment to protect your child's teeth from tooth decay.
- Follow a daily plan to take care of your child's teeth: brush teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste. Have your child drink fluoridated water. Use any aids recommended by the dentist or hygienist to keep teeth and mouth clean.

These actions will help to prevent tooth decay (cavities) in your child.

Additional information: [Special Needs Fact Sheets for Providers and Caregivers](#)



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