

Your Child's First Dental Visit

It's important for children to visit the dentist early to ensure they are off to a good start with their oral health. The first dental visit is an extremely important step in a child's life long oral health.

When should my child first see a dentist, and why?

The ideal time for a child to visit the dentist is six months after the child's first (primary) teeth erupt—and no later than his or her first birthday. This time frame is a perfect opportunity for the dentist to examine carefully the development of the child's mouth. Because dental problems often start early, the sooner the child visits the dentist, the better. The dentist also can provide or recommend special preventive care to protect against problems, such as early childhood tooth decay, teething irritations, gum disease, and prolonged thumb- or pacifier-sucking.

How do I prepare my child and myself for this first visit?

Before the visit, ask the dentist about the procedures that will take place during the first appointment so there are no surprises. Plan a course of action for any possible reactions your child may have. Very young children may be fussy and not want to sit still. Others may become very frightened and cry. Some children may not react negatively at all. Some may enjoy the appointment very much!

Make the upcoming appointment something for your child to look forward to. Help your child understand what will happen during the visit. There are a



number of children's books about going to the dentist. Read these books with your child before his or her first visit to familiarize your child with what will happen at the dentist and help lessen any potential anxiety.

Also, be sure to bring records of your child's complete medical history for his or her dental file.

What happens during the first visit?

Often a first visit is simply a time to acquaint your child with the dentist and the practice. As a parent, you should reassure your child that the visit is not scary or something about which to be

afraid. Short, successive visits can build the child's comfort with the dentist and the dental office.

Your child's appointment should be scheduled earlier in the day, when your child is alert and refreshed. You may need to sit in the dental chair and hold your child during the first examination. The first visit usually lasts between 15 and 30 minutes and may include any of the following, depending on the child's age:

- A gentle but thorough examination of the teeth, jaw, bite, gums, and oral tissues to monitor growth and development and observe any problem areas;
- A gentle cleaning, which includes polishing teeth and removing any plaque, tartar build-up, and stains;
- X-rays;
- A demonstration on how to properly care for your child's mouth and teeth at home;
- Nutritional counseling; and,
- An assessment of the need for fluoride.

The dentist will be able to answer any questions you have and will make you and your child feel comfortable throughout the visit.

When should we schedule the next appointment?

Children, like adults, should see the dentist every six months. When your child is very young, some dentists may schedule interim visits every three months in order to build the child's comfort and confidence levels or for treatment needs. If you have questions about your child's dental needs, please talk to your dentist.



The AGD is a member of the Partnership for Healthy Mouths, Healthy Lives, a first-of-its-kind national dental coalition comprised of 35 leading dental health organizations. Look for more information about the Kids' Healthy Mouths campaign at www.2min2x.org.

www.KnowYourTeeth.com

Brought to you by the AGD, this website answers important dental health questions, offers the latest information on current treatments, provides tips for first-rate oral hygiene, and can help visitors find highly-qualified general dentists near where they live.

Want more fact sheets? Go to www.agd.org/practicemanagement/factsheet.

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