

Calling all parents!

Tips for infants and toddlers that can make a difference. *by Dr. Susan Maples*

One third of all U.S. three-year-olds already have active caries (tooth decay disease). Forty-four percent of kindergartners have or need fillings. Childhood obesity and diabetes are now epidemic in our country. Do you want to change those facts starting with your own household? Here's my advice on how to establish good habits:

Cavity prevention

- Know that caries (the disease of tooth decay) is transmissible. Babies are not born with the bacteria that create decay—it is spread from saliva. Take care not to swap spit with your kiddo by avoiding licking pacifiers, sharing cups or tasting foods from a spoon that will go into your baby's mouth.
- Be certain you have adequate fluoride in your tap water, as it is

incorporated in growing enamel for a lifetime of protection. If you are uncertain, have your water tested by the health department and consult your dentist for fluoride supplementation. Avoid bottled water if possible.

- Keep sweets to an absolute minimum in quantity and frequency.

Nutrition

- Avoid refined sugar and processed food for toddlers including juice and sugar-laden breakfast cereal. Juice is the number one cause of malnutrition in kids. It is highly caloric, which reduces hunger for other foods and establishes an attraction to all sugary beverages. Increase whole fruits and vegetables instead.
- Avoid food additives and preservatives by reading labels. If you don't recognize some of the ingredients as food, don't feed it to your child!

- Practice the one-finger rule: If you can't cover the ingredients with your toddler's little finger, it doesn't go in the grocery cart.
- In order to expand your child's tastes establish a household rule that he/she must taste every food on his/her plate at every meal. Studies show it takes an average of seven exposures to a food to establish a positive acceptance. Ultimately, building a preference for a variety of whole fresh foods will increase micronutrients and fiber intake for a lifetime.
- From birth, don't force or restrict food intake. As well, don't use food as punishment or reward. Allow your child to consume food as his/her natural hunger demands. Serve modest portions and let him/her dictate how much more he/she will eat. Don't worry...it is natural

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for caloric intake to vary on a daily basis, depending on caloric needs. It is unhealthy to dictate that for your child.

Oral hygiene home care

- Engage your child in his/her self-care, being patient while he/she practices with a toothbrush.
- To avoid an over exposure to fluoride, use a pea-sized amount of non-fluoride toothpaste for babies. Switch to fluoride toothpaste after the child is able to spit out the excess.
- If your child resists brushing, add some excitement with the gift of a fun new action-figure spin brush. Let him/her help in the selection.
- Always supervise your child's efforts and then complete a "once over" yourself. For safety and thoroughness it's best to position yourself behind your kiddo (with his/her back to you and head tipped up).

Growth and development

- Babies and toddlers shouldn't snore. If you notice any noisy breathing or snoring consult your pediatrician and dentist. Sleep disordered breathing in a child can set them up for problems with proper brain development, behavior problems and obesity.
- Throughout your child's life, allow your dentist to monitor proper tooth eruption. Extra or missing teeth are somewhat common and without proper planning and care can pose more serious problems later.

First visit recommendations

It is important for your child to visit the dentist for an Infant Oral Health Visit under the age of one. All the American medical and dental associations support this recommendation. You can expect extensive parent education, baby examination for proper growth and development and a first fluoride varnish application for all erupted teeth. Continue fluoride varnish every six months.

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