



FIGHT TOOTH DECAY THE RIGHT WAY

Improve your child's oral health with these five simple tips

BABY TEETH ARE MORE IMPORTANT

than we might realise. According to a recent Straits Times report, more than half of all children in Singapore have one or more decayed baby teeth by the time they start primary school.

This is a cause for concern, because baby teeth do more than help a child chew and speak - they also save space for permanent teeth!

A baby tooth usually remains in the child's mouth until a permanent tooth beneath it is ready to emerge through the gums. The roots of the baby tooth dissolve and the tooth becomes loose and falls out.

If the baby tooth is lost early, the space it occupies can be lost by other teeth moving into the gap. This can result in crowded teeth, or permanent teeth that can get stuck beneath the gums. If this happens, your child may lose a permanent tooth.



1. GET YOUR OWN TEETH CHECKED

Your baby is born with a mouth free of bacteria, so any decay-causing bacteria usually comes from the father or mother. If you or your spouse have tooth decay or gum disease, see a dentist for treatment immediately.

Avoid sharing utensils with your relatives. If others kiss your child, ask them to kiss on the cheeks instead of the lips.

2. AVOID SNACKING AND SUGARY FOODS

Cut down on the frequency and amount of sugars consumed. Sugary foods should be consumed only at mealtimes. Limit consumption of foods and drinks with added sugars to no more than four times a day.

3. PRACTICE GOOD ORAL HYGIENE

Brushing should start as soon as the first baby tooth appears. Brush twice a day - once at night before sleep and one other time each day.

For children under three, use a toothpaste containing at least 1,000 ppm fluoride, and should use no more than a smear of toothpaste (a thin film of paste covering less than three-quarters of the brush). Make sure your child does not eat or lick toothpaste from the tube.

4. USE A CUP

Baby bottle tooth decay occurs when sweetened liquids or those with natural sugars (such as milk, formula and fruit juice) cling to an infant's teeth for a long time.



Do not fill bottles with sugar water and soft drinks. Bottles are for milk, water, formula and special electrolyte-containing solutions when the child has diarrhoea. Dilute fruit juice with equal parts water to interest your child in a "sippy cup". Avoid soft drinks as they have no nutritional value.

At the age of one, you should wean your child off the bottle and use a cup instead.

5. SEE YOUR DENTIST REGULARLY

Your child should visit the dentist at the age of one. This visit is important to introduce them to dental treatment. By helping to detect any problems early, your dentist can act to prevent any dental condition from worsening. ○