

Good oral hygiene starts early

Good oral hygiene is key to your child's overall health and well-being. Children benefit from dental care in many ways. The first teeth (baby teeth) play an important role in a child's development. They help to chew food, speak properly and build confidence, while leaving enough room for the permanent teeth (adult teeth).

A low-sugar diet that avoids soft drinks, energy drinks and juice (even if 100% natural) promotes healthy teeth. Depending on how often and when they're consumed, these foods and drinks can cause tooth decay and erosion, compromising oral health.¹ They should be consumed in moderation and with meals only.

Cavities can appear very early. Healthy eating habits and daily brushing will prevent cavities and promote good dental health.

It's important to start cleaning your child's teeth early. As soon as they appear, start cleaning them with a soft-bristled toothbrush and floss between adjacent teeth.

Children need to be taught to brush and floss regularly from an early age so they develop good dental habits. Since children lack the dexterity to brush their teeth properly, parents should assist and supervise them until about 8 years of age (or later), depending on the child's ability.

Dental health: Simple things you can do

Tips to help your child develop good dental health habits

Be careful not to infect your child with cavity-causing bacteria!

- ✓ Don't put their pacifier in your mouth.
- ✓ Don't use their utensils to taste their food.
- ✓ Don't let other family members use their toothbrush.

1. Portail Santé Montréal, accessed December 2012-12-02.
www.santemontreal.qc.ca/vivre-en-sante/sante-des-jeunes/sante-dentaire/alimentation/#c3557.

Breastfeeding is beneficial to dental health

- ✓ It promotes proper jaw and facial development. It helps reduce the use of pacifiers and prevent cavities.

Toothbrushing

- ✓ From the outset, it's important to clean your baby's gums and inside their mouth after each feeding with a clean, damp cloth.
- ✓ When the first teeth emerge, brush them twice a day and teach your child how to do it as soon as they can. Be a good role model!
- ✓ Use a grain of rice of **children's fluoride toothpaste** for children under 3 years old and a pea-sized amount for children 3 to 6 years old.
- ✓ Don't give your child water after brushing so the fluoride in the toothpaste stays in contact with the tooth enamel longer.
- ✓ Start flossing when the first teeth come in. Show them how to floss as well.
- ✓ Get your child into the habit of brushing their teeth early on, for 2 to 3 minutes in the morning and at night before going to bed.
- ✓ For most young children, there's little advantage to using an electric toothbrush. Your dentist may still recommend one if your child is more likely to get cavities.

Beware of sugar!

Sugar found in food and drinks mix with normal oral bacteria and produce acid that attacks teeth and causes cavities.

- ✓ Never put your child to bed with a bottle (unless it contains water only).
- ✓ Limit sugar intake at mealtime and avoid sweets, snacks and sugary drinks between meals.
- ✓ Beware of foods labelled "no sugar added" as they may contain natural sugar (**e.g., fruit juices, which should be avoided or limited to a maximum of 60-120 ml [2-4 oz] a day**).

Choosing the right food

- ✓ Avoid soft, sticky treats that get stuck in teeth (jubes, candies, dried fruits, caramels).
- ✓ Give your child tooth-friendly foods and snacks such as cheese, raw vegetables, fresh fruit, nuts and yogurt.
- ✓ Limit your child's daily sugar intake (solid or liquid).
- ✓ Serve milk or water with or at the end of meals **and only water between meals**.

Going to the dentist

- ✓ Schedule your child's first dental checkup no later than one year of age.
- ✓ Keep going for regular checkups.
- ✓ The RAMQ covers most oral care services (annual checkups, X-rays, cavity repairs) for children 10 years of age and under. Fluoride and sealant treatments aren't covered by the RAMQ.

Preventing dental disease: the role of the dentist and dental hygienist

Dentists and dental hygienists play a critical role in preventing dental disease. During checkups, they can:

- ✓ Detect small problems before they get bigger.
- ✓ Clean the teeth and remove tartar, which causes gum disease.
- ✓ Give advice on how to maintain proper oral health (diet, toothbrushing, fluoride, etc.).
- ✓ Provide fluoride and sealant treatments to protect teeth.

Resources for parents

For more information on:

- ✓ Dental care coverage, visit the RAMQ website
- ✓ Oral health, visit the Ordre des hygiénistes dentaires du Québec website
- ✓ How to find a dentist, visit the Ordre des dentistes du Québec website

DENTAL HEALTH TOOLKIT

Prevention is the top priority for your children	Ordre des hygiénistes dentaires du Québec www.ohdq.com
The five-point prevention plan	Canadian Dental Association www.cda-adc.ca
What you need to know about children's dental health	Ordre des dentistes www.mabouchenesante.com
Useful tips: How to maintain good oral health	Portail Santé Montréal www.santemontreal.qc.ca