

3 TO 6 YEARS

The Growing Years



At age three, kids start to have minds of their own. Usually by this age, they have firm opinions about doctor visits and what foods they will eat. If the child has been to the dentist prior to this age, he or she should have no fear or frustration about dental appointments. On the other hand, if at this age he or she is going to the dentist for the first time, the situation may not be as easy. Anything the child hasn't already been trained to do (such as potty training, going to bed on time, or taking medicine) takes a lot of extra effort from parents. And now you can add going to the dentist to that list.

By age six, your child's jaws are growing to make room for the permanent teeth. The first permanent molars usually erupt between ages five and six. Parents often mistake them for baby teeth. These molars are especially important because they help determine the shape of the lower face. They also affect the position and health of permanent teeth. It is hard to



SEALANTS: ONE DECAY BARRIER

A sealant is a clear plastic material that protects tooth surfaces that have deep grooves and pits. Often these surfaces include the chewing surfaces of back teeth, which is where most cavities in children are found. Properly applied sealants create a barrier against decay. But this doesn't mean you can get lax about cleaning the teeth. Children still need to brush at least twice a day and floss *between* their teeth daily.

Sealants are only one step in preventing decay and they don't seal between the teeth. Ice or hard candy can chip or break the sealant and acidic-type beverages can eat away at the protective sealant cover. Don't be surprised if sealants need to be replaced. Your child's dentist may or may not suggest sealants as the treatment of choice. Instead, the dentist may put a filling material over the grooves to keep out plaque and food to decrease the risk of tooth decay.

HOW MUCH FLUORIDE?

Don't use excessive amounts of fluoride because it can cause white spots (*fluorosis*) in permanent teeth. When this happens, the enamel formation gets disrupted and causes cosmetic changes to the teeth that make them look chalky white.

To find out the level of fluoride in your local drinking water call your local water company and ask, "What concentration of fluoride is in your 'finished' drinking water?" The EPA recommends that the maximum amount of fluoride is 0.7 to 1.0 milligrams per liter. Most bottled water does not contain fluoride. Therefore, some children may be getting too little fluoride, and the dentist (or pediatrician) may recommend a fluoride supplement.

imagine, but those little six-year molars will be in baby's mouth for another 70-plus years. So treat them kindly!

Toddler's Tooth Care

Once a child has most of his or her baby teeth, it is time for you to start flossing them. Brush at least twice daily and always at bedtime. Make your brushing routine fun and the child will look forward to it. Be creative. Begin a ritual of singing a song, listening to the child's favorite music, or making up a story about the "brushing and flossing fairy." Let the child begin brushing; then finish for him or her.

You might notice that your child has spaces between the teeth. No need to worry. This is common because the permanent teeth can be twice as large as the teeth they are replacing. Flossing at this point is mainly to get the child in the

habit of seeing and feeling floss in his/her mouth.

Six Things to Remember about Toddler Tooth Care:

1. Use a soft, small toothbrush.
2. Use only a pea-sized amount of toothpaste.
3. Don't let children eat toothpaste.
4. Always brush before bedtime.
5. Be a positive role model. Let your kids see you brush and floss your teeth.
6. Don't share your toothbrush with your kids.

DETECTING TODDLER PROBLEMS



✘ Into the Mouths of Babes. If your child's thumb sucking persists at age four, it may be time for concern. The dentist should evaluate the situation. If any damage or malformation is present in the mouth, the dentist may recommend a special retainer to inhibit sucking.

✘ A Tooth in Crisis. Between the ages of three and six, kids fall a lot, often hitting their mouths while riding bikes and playing. At this age, gum tissue heals quickly. Baby

teeth can be hit, banged, or chipped and the injury won't necessarily have any effect on the permanent teeth. As a precaution though, always call the dentist as soon as possible if you have any concerns.

DOS AND DON'TS

- ◆ **Do** replace your child's toothbrush every one to two months and immediately following a cold or the flu.
- ◆ **Do** have your child brush at least twice a day.
- ◆ **Don't** let your child go to bed without brushing.
- ◆ **Don't** let your child drink juice, milk, or soft drinks during the night either by cup or by bottle.
- ◆ **Do** keep toothpaste out of the reach of children. If ingested in excess, it can cause the child to become ill.
- ◆ **Do** store toothbrushes so they do not touch each other.
- ◆ **Don't** share toothbrushes.
- ◆ **Don't** attempt to re-insert a baby tooth into baby's mouth if it is knocked out or dislodged. Call your dentist immediately.

