

Improving Oral Health of a Child: A Parent's Guide

Debasruti Naik¹, Motirmoy Giri², Ramesh Nagarajappa², Sudipta Sahu³, Kajal Kiran Sahu⁴

¹Senior Lecturer, Department of Public Health Dentistry, ²Senior Resident, Fakir Mohan Medical College, Balasore, Odisha, India, ³Professor and Head, Department of Public Health Dentistry, ⁴Tutor, Department of Public Health Dentistry, ⁵Tutor, Department of Prosthodontics, Institute of Dental Sciences, Siksha 'O' Anusandhan (Deemed to be University), Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India

Abstract

For every parent, the early phase of growing a child is one of their life's most challenging as well as responsible experiences that can bring out the very best in us our patience and our skill to provide them good health. This article will provide essential information to help out parents build knowledge about maintaining good oral health of their children and also will help to make out the vital building blocks of parent-child relationships. This article will also help parents reflecting their actions to better understand their children's oral health. Small children at their younger age are very sensitive to social stimuli such as praise as well as affection and they learn best by imitating their parents. This knowledge will help parents to guide their children as they grow towards handling their oral health. This article is meant for parents of children of all ages and in all cultures which will be helpful and may provide insight to professionals like caregivers, teachers and early childhood educators.

Keywords: Parental Guidance, Knowledge on dental health, Child oral health.

Introduction

Oral health is considered as an important aspect of general health; good oral health provides healthy mental, physical and social well-being of an individual as well as provides enjoyment of their lives by allowing them to eat, speak and socialize devoid of experiencing pain, discomfort or embarrassment. Every child should benefit from a high paradigm of health, including oral health but during the early ages of their childhood they are dependent on their parents only. The dental health profession has an accountability to promote the best possible oral health for all children. Kids less than 5

years of age usually invest maximum time with their parents.¹ Some researches reported that the maintenance and outcomes of young kid's health invariably are affected by their parent's knowledge.¹

A child's well-being of psychological, functional, and social dimensions are affected by dental health. Because of dental pain, distressing effects on kids, including poor growth, lost sleep, behavioral problems, and learning can be seen. Proper health inconvenience leads to a substantial reduction in school attendance and simultaneously hampers in parental working days.²

For every parent, the early phase of growing a child is one of their life's most challenging as well as responsible experiences that can bring out the very best in us our patience and our skill to provide them good health. This article will provide essential information to help out parents build knowledge about maintaining good oral health of their children and also will help to make out the vital building blocks of parent-child relationships. This article will also help parents reflecting their actions to better understand their children's oral health. This knowledge will help parents to guide their

Corresponding Author:

Debasruti Naik

Senior Lecturer, Department of Public Health Dentistry, Institute of Dental Sciences, Siksha 'O' Anusandhan (Deemed to be University), Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India

e-mail: smilewithdebshruti@gmail.com

children as they grow towards handling their oral health. This article is meant for parents of children of all ages and in all cultures which will be helpful and may provide insight to professionals like caregivers, teachers, and early childhood educators.

Baby's teeth begin forming: Months before birth Infant teeth begin to develop. Tooth buds start appearing by the 6th week of pregnancy and keep on forming till 6 months. By the time baby born the crowns of primary teeth formation gets completed and until the baby begins teething they will stay behind hidden the gums.³

Looking for the teeth to erupt:

- Primary teeth will appear out in the mouth as early as 6 months till 12 months of age.
- First the lower front two teeth will appear.
- There is nothing to be worried as in some babies few teeth might appear late and by the age of 3 years, all 20 primary teeth will be present.

New Permanent Teeth: In the late 6 years of age, an eruption of 32 permanent teeth (16 in each upper and lower jaw) occurs that are the substitute of 20 primary teeth. The oral cavity contains both primary and permanent teeth during this period that might be a reason for small kids at increased risk of caries. The enamel of newly erupted is inadequately mineralized after its formation and its surface remains porous. During the phase of permanent teeth eruption, occlusal surfaces of the new permanent teeth will be resting on the lower level than the primary teeth. And because of this toothbrushing becomes more difficult than before. With the increasing number of permanent teeth in the mouth, the maintenance of the narrower interdental spaces becomes very important and crucial.⁴

Why Parent should be Concerned on Taking Care of Baby Teeth?:

- Healthy teeth are required for the baby and toddlers to chew their food properly while eating.
- Teeth has an important role to play in speech development as they learn how to talk.
- Primary teeth are needed to be maintained till the eruption of permanent teeth because the early loss of baby teeth can cause crowding of the permanent teeth.
- There will be a hindrance in the learning procedure

if the primary teeth will be affected by any kind of oral disease-causing pain and infection.⁵

Beginning of Dental Care: By the first year of age, dental check-up at regular intervals of at least twice each year should be recommended.⁶

1. Birth to 6 months old:

- Baby's mouth has to be cleaned with water and a gauze or a cloth or a soft infant toothbrush after feedings and at bedtime can be used.
- If a child is living in an area without fluoridated water then dental health professionals should be about the use of fluoride supplements and the application of fluoride varnish.
- Regular feeding habits (bottle feeding and breastfeeding) should be established.

2. 6 to 12 months old:

- During the child's first birthday, the first tooth should appear and the pediatric dentist should be consulted for an exam as soon as possible for confirming about no worries.
- Tooth brushing needs to be done twice daily and specifically after feeding at night with a small, soft-bristled brush.
- During the phase of learning how to walk, a child may undergo facial injuries that might include teeth as well as other facial structures. Therefore, the parents and caregivers need to stay alert during this period.
- Breastfeeding for at least 1 year is recommended and after that year whole that milk should be used for proper development body and brain.⁷

3. 1 to 3 years old

- The scheduled dental checkups should be followed every 6 months as recommended by the child's pediatric dentist.
- By the age of 3 years, a child should learn how to brush his teeth and how to clean and rinse.

Protecting Your Child's Teeth: Below are the following points which help the parents to improve their child's oral health and protect from getting affected by oral diseases: -

- Drinking water containing fluoride (optimal amount of 0.7 mg per liter) should be given to the

child to prevent tooth decay. In doubt of fluoride concentration, dentists, pediatricians or nurses should be consulted.⁸

- Parents should make sure that their child brushes their teeth twice a day daily.
- The teeth of a child should be brushed properly without toothpaste with a small, soft-bristled toothbrush and plain water.⁹
- Children below 6 years should brush their teeth under the supervision of parents or caretakers so that they can develop good brushing skills. It should be taken care that they only use a pea-sized amount of toothpaste and always spits it out rather than swallows it.
- Need for the application of fluoride varnish on the teeth as soon as the first tooth appears should be discussed with the dentist, family doctor, nurse or pediatrician.
- **Get a Check-up:** During the child's first birthday, the first tooth should appear and the pediatric dentist should be consulted for an exam as soon as possible for confirming about no worries.
- **Spreading of cavities to be prevented to your infant:** Mouth to mouth contact should be limited by not sharing food or eating utensils, and by not placing objects in your mouth and then in your infant's mouth.
- **Avoid 'Baby Bottle Decay:** A child should not be put to sleep with a bottle of milk or juice. Sugary liquids can stick to his teeth, feeding bacteria that can cause cavities.
- **Cut Back on Juice:** A lot of parents have some thoughts regarding juice that it is a healthier choice for a drink. Juice should be limited to no more than 4 ounces a day of 100% fruit juice. Preference for on-sugary drinks and foods at mealtimes should be given.
- **Control the Sippy Cup:** Over-using of a sippy cup can result in cavities on the anterior teeth if the drinks are sugary.
- **Teach Good Habits:** Washing mouth properly after every meal. Brushing twice a day. Limiting sticky and sugary foods.

Children and their daily food eating habits¹⁰:

- Fruit, green and leafy vegetables, grain, and healthy dairy foods including cheese, milk, and unsweetened yogurt should be served for a healthy body.
- Sugary foods should be limited. Foods like candy, cake, cookies, and sweetened drinks can only increase the risk of tooth decay.
- Sticky foods like caramels and fruit roll-ups should also be limited.
- Eating between meals need to be limited.

Oral Hygiene Maintenance for Kids¹¹: It has to be mandatory for every child to have his or her toothbrush as soon as the child has teeth inside his mouth.

Toothbrush for your child:

- Toothbrush with soft-structured bristles has to be chosen as it cleans the teeth better.
- A small child-sized toothbrush with large handles should be chosen. For being more comfortable, children can choose from various colorful toothbrushes.
- Toothbrushes need to be replaced every 3 months or maybe sooner if a child chews her toothbrush bristles or has been sick.
- Children under the 3 years old should use a smear of fluoride-containing toothpaste in case there is inadequate intake of fluoride daily.
- Parents need to apply a pea-sized amount of the toothpaste and spread along the head of the brush.

Sealants Can Seal the Deal for the Teeth: To prevent decay, sealants are preferred as a preventive procedure. The sealant applied on the teeth acts as a hurdle that protects the cavities prone areas of the posterior teeth from acids and plaque. The sealants have to be checked regularly by the dentist, since they do tear out away and might require reapplication of the sealant. If lost, sealants have to be replaced immediately, as they are effective simply as long as they are retained on the teeth.¹²

Table 1. Caring for your child's teeth during a dental emergency.¹³

Condition	What should parents or child care providers do?
Knocked out (avulsed) tooth	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Get back the tooth and grasp it by the crown. In case the tooth is dirty then gently rinse it, if possible in the child's saliva. 2. Tooth can be stored in a cup of cool milk. 3. Parents of the injured child need to be contacted first to take the child to the dentist immediately.
Broken tooth	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rinse with warm water. 2. Cold compress like ice cubes can be used on the area to keep swelling down.
Bitten tongue or lip	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pressure to the injured area should be applied using a clean cloth to stop any bleeding. 2. Cold compress to be placed to avoid swelling.
Objects caught between teeth	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Careful and proper use of dental floss between the teeth to remove the object has to be instructed to the child. 2. A dentist needs to be consulted if the object is not easily removable.
Toothache	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mouth rinse with warm water and floss to remove any food that might be trapped should be done by the child.
Trauma to jaw/ broken jaw	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cold compresses need to be applied to swollen areas and any kind of cloth-like scarf, handkerchief or towel around the jaw and over the top of the head should be tied to hold the jaw in place. 2. Emergency treatment needs to provide at the earliest.

Conclusion

The groundwork and the basis for strong teeth in children, as well as teenagers, is set during the early years of life. The contribution of parents towards good oral health is immiscible. Poor oral hygiene practices and diet habits are the primary reasons for cavities and gum diseases in children. The formation of caries in primary teeth gradually increases the risk of caries formation in permanent teeth also. Hence it is required to set up a proper and routine oral maintenance at the earliest during childhood to make sure the growth of strong as well as healthy teeth. Parents are considered as the constant role model for their children and they are also the key to make sure of a daily practice and in making their children value the importance of oral hygiene. Small children at their younger age are very sensitive to social stimuli such as praise as well as affection and they learn best by imitating their parents. Therefore, every parent should understand the importance of healthy teeth and should take proper care of them during their development to ensure a healthy future of their kids.

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