Your Child’s Teeth from Birth to 6 Years Old

Teeth Growth
- A baby’s teeth start to come in when the baby is about 6 months old and by age 3 years, most children have a full set of 20 primary (baby) teeth. Starting infants with good oral care can help protect their teeth for the years to come.
- As teeth erupt, some babies have sore gums. Rubbing the gums with a wet gauze or providing a clean, chilled teething ring may help ease these tender areas. If the issues continue, talk to your pediatrician about other options.

Prevent cavities
- Tooth decay can begin as soon as teeth erupt. Untreated cavities can lead to tooth pain and dental abscess. This can then lead to poor health due to loss of sleep and poor eating habits.
- Never put your baby to bed with a bottle or sippy cup containing sugary liquids such as fruit juice, soda, or other sweetened liquids. Frequent sipping at night will result in the development of Baby Bottle Tooth Decay. The bacteria in the mouth will use the sugar in the drink to make acid and break down the teeth causing cavities.
- Encourage healthy eating habits including drinking plenty of water and eating fruits, vegetables and whole grain foods. Limit sweets to mealtimes only.
- After each meal, wipe a baby’s gums with a damp washcloth. Once the teeth have begun to erupt, use a child-sized toothbrush with a pea-sized amount of a children’s toothpaste and brush the teeth for 1 – 2 minutes. Face your child and encourage them to brush to keep their mouth fresh and clean. Make sure you show them how and where to brush their teeth, including the outer surfaces of the teeth, the inner surfaces, and lastly, the chewing surfaces, in both the upper and lower jaws.
- If they can rinse, have them rinse with cool tap water and spit out. If they cannot rinse, have them spit out completely into the sink.
- Flossing should be performed once daily after brushing, with the floss gently guided back and forth until you feel resistance. Repeat between each of the teeth and also behind the last teeth. You should help your child floss until he or she can do it alone, usually age 10.
Sucking habits
- Sucking habits usually stop between the ages of 2 to 4. If your child uses a pacifier or sucks his or her thumb, talk to your dentist about how to wean off of this habit. Pacifiers should not be used after age 2, and thumb sucking should end by age 4.

First Dental Visit
- It is a good idea to have the first dental visit within 6 months after the first tooth appears, but no later than your child’s first birthday. It’s best to meet the dentist when the child is having no dental problems – don’t wait for an emergency.
- Dentist can do several things at the first visit:
  - Review child’s health history
  - Complete oral exam to check growth and development, oral hygiene, cavities or other problems
  - Determine if child is at risk for caries development
  - Clean the teeth and give tips for daily care
  - Determine if child is getting enough fluoride
  - Review eating practices that may lead to decay
  - Discuss common dental injuries and prevention
  - Discuss and review any needed treatment and schedule the next check-up

Teaching children the importance of good oral care early is a great way to set healthy habits for life. Dental disease is almost entirely preventable, and untreated dental disease can lead to serious health problems.