

PARENT CONNECTIONS

A Newsletter for First Steps Families ♦ December 2010

Oral Care for Infants and Toddlers

Infants and toddlers can have dental problems, so good oral care should start early – before that first tooth ever appears!

Gum and teeth cleaning are important first steps in preventing tooth decay and oral health problems.

To clean an infant's gums:

- Wash your hands thoroughly; gloves also are recommended for child caregivers.
- Use your finger to gently wipe a soft, damp washcloth or gauze over the baby's gums after feeding to prevent a build-up of damaging bacteria; gently massage the gums. A 2-by-2 inch gauze square works well and is disposable.
- Once the child has teeth showing, brush them with a very soft, tiny infant's toothbrush and plain water; do not use toothpaste. Clean and massage gums in areas that remain toothless.



Try these tips for helping babies and toddlers clean their teeth:

- Most toddlers are anxious to do things on their own, so once a child is able to get control of hands and fingers (usually after 10 months to a year), you can give him a tiny toothbrush and allow him to “brush” his teeth himself. This promotes good hygiene habits in the child. However, you should continue to follow up the “brushing” by cleaning the teeth and gums. You need two toothbrushes since the infant will probably “gum” and bite one, and you need a good infant brush to effectively clean teeth and gums.
- Always supervise the child! Do not allow a child to walk or crawl with a toothbrush in his or her mouth; if the child falls, the toothbrush could easily be forced down the throat or through the roof of the mouth.

The American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry recommend that infants have a dental exam by the age of 1 year or as the first teeth emerge. However, a complete dental exam may not be feasible since infants do not have many teeth. Therefore, many dental health professionals recommend an oral exam to check the infant's teeth. This may be performed by a dental assistant, hygienist or the child's pediatrician as well as a dentist.

TRY THESE TIPS TO AVOID TOOTH DECAY IN INFANTS AND TODDLERS:

- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that toddlers consume no more than 6 ounces of juice per day. Avoid giving the child a bottle of sweetened liquid several times a day or allowing a child to carry a bottle or cup to drink at will.
- Avoid giving a pacifier sweetened with honey, corn syrup or other sweet liquid. Note: Honey should never be given to an infant because it may contain harmful botulism bacteria that can form toxins in the infant's digestive system.
- Never allow the child to fall asleep with a bottle containing milk, formula, fruit juice or sweetened liquids; not only can this lead to tooth decay, but the fluid (even water) can increase the chances of the child choking or having ear infections. If the child needs a comforter between regular feedings, give the child a clean pacifier.

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A Missouri Family's Story

By Maria of Independence, Mo.

As a parent of a child enrolled in First Steps, I feel that these services are essential for proper growth and development. My almost 3-year-old son, Christopher, began receiving First Steps services for language and speech in 2009 after our move from New York. At the beginning, I thought it would be a challenge – our primary language at home is Spanish, and services are provided in English. Fortunately, he was able to pick up very quickly, and his improvements in speech have been tremendous. One of the greatest differences I have noticed is the fact that other people are able to understand him, and he really tries to use his words more (even if he says them incorrectly). He is at the stage of asking questions; “why” is a big one, so he questions the things around him. With his vocabulary constantly expanding, Christopher has a lot more to question!

Surprisingly, his social skills also have benefited from this experience. He is more outgoing and is quick to greet people when we go out (something he struggled with before). He used to hide behind me and shy away from people. By being able to speak more clearly, he shows much more confidence when we go places in public. He plays with other kids and encourages his baby brother to take part in the playtime as well. Christopher is a great teacher to his brother. Several times I have seen him show his brother an object and slowly repeat its name so his brother can repeat it as well. It's obvious that the program has benefited not only him, but our entire family.

SNOW SONGS AND RHYMES

PRETTY SNOWFLAKES

Tune: "London Bridge"

Pretty snowflakes falling down,
Falling down, falling down.

Pretty snowflakes falling down
All through the town.

Pretty snowflakes, on the street,
On the grass, on my feet.

Pretty snowflakes falling down
All through the town.

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I LOVE SNOW

Tune: "Three Blind Mice"

I love snow, I love snow.
Soft white snow, soft white snow.
It falls on the ground so soft and white.
Sometimes it falls all through the night.
Did you ever see such a beautiful sight,
As soft white snow?

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