

Caring for Children's Teeth Not Difficult

Question: "Dr. Arnold, what is the best way to ensure that my children don't get cavities?"

Answer: It's a good idea to schedule your children's first dental appointment by age three in order to ensure that any early problems are attended to quickly. Additionally, this helps to get them acclimated to dental visits at an early age. If you observe dark stains or holes in any teeth before they turn three, it would be wise to have a pedodontist (children's dental specialist) evaluate them earlier.

As soon as a child has teeth, we recommend that parents begin brushing them two times each day with an infant brush, without toothpaste. When your kids are able to brush their own teeth, show them how to do it properly and help them to finish. There are even child "flossers" with handles that you can begin to use while your kids are small.

Eating a balanced diet with items from all of the basic food groups and limiting the amount of sugary snacks and pop that kids eat is essential to good dental health. If you are able to minimize the amount of sweets that kids eat at an early age, they will be less likely to eat too much of this type of food when they get older.

Many kids eat too much "sugary" cereal and drink too much pop, as well. Unfortunately, many types of juice are also extremely high in sugar and can increase the likelihood of cavities. It would be wise to check on the packages to determine how much sugar these foods and beverages contain.

Some brands of bottled water do not contain fluoride, so encourage children to drink "tap" water because its fluoridation will help strengthen their developing teeth. If you have "well" water, fluoride supplements may be necessary.

February is Children's Dental Health Month. Following these basic guidelines should increase the likelihood that your children will have strong, healthy teeth. Regular dental visits while growing up will set the stage for a lifetime of good oral health. Additionally, you should set a good example for your children by taking good care of your own teeth and gums.

The opinions expressed solely are those of the writer. This column is intended for informational purposes only. Readers should seek specific advice from their own dentist. Dr. Arnold can be reached at drarnold@smilesbyarnold.com or 1830 S. 11th St., Chesterton, IN 46304. You may also visit his Web site at www.SmilesByArnold.com.