



# Speaking for Children

What's best for our youngest children is best for everyone!

## Good dental habits start early

Regular dental checkups, a balanced diet, fluoride, injury prevention, and brushing and flossing are all important for healthy teeth. Starting children off with good dental habits will help them grow up with healthy smiles. Research shows that poor oral health affects children's school performance, making them less successful later in life. Establishing the right oral care habits early helps get kids headed on the path to a lifetime of good oral health.

The American Association of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD) recommends that a child's first dental visit occur shortly after the first tooth comes in and no later than the child's first birthday. But according to the 2005 National Survey of Children's Health (NSHC), only 10 percent of one-year olds and 23.8 percent of two-year olds had a preventive dental care visit in the past year.

Try these tips from the AAPD to help prevent tooth decay in your young children:

- **Year-one dental visit:** Dental visits should begin around six months or when your baby gets his first tooth, but no later than one year. The earlier the dental visit, the better the chance of preventing dental problems. Children with healthy teeth chew food easily, learn to speak clearly and smile with confidence. At the first visit, the pediatric dentist provides information about a complete program of preventive home care. The dentist also checks the child's teeth and gums to make sure they're developing properly
- **Healthy eating habits:** Parents should ensure their children are eating a balanced diet and should limit snacking, which can increase a child's risk of developing cavities.
- **Regular brushing and flossing:** Twice daily dental cleaning should start as soon as your infant's first tooth appears. Wipe the teeth with a piece of gauze or a damp cloth. Switch to a toothbrush with a fluoride toothpaste as he gets older. Any two teeth that are touching each other should be flossed to prevent a cavity from forming between the teeth.
- **Fluoride use:** Young children require fluoride to help developing teeth grow strong, and it helps prevent tooth decay in older children when used on a regular basis. Children may not be getting the fluoride they need. Talk to your dentist about your child's fluoride needs.

## Dental Resources

**Cultivando la Salud/Cultivating Health Mobile Dental Clinic, St. Joseph Health System:** Mobile community dental clinic. Call 547-2237. [www.stjosephhealth.org](http://www.stjosephhealth.org)

**Immediate Healthcare for Kids (Kids' Net) Community Action Partnership of Sonoma County (CAP Sonoma):** Provides uninsured children (0-17 years) access to volunteer healthcare providers in Sonoma County. Call 544-KNET (5638). [www.capsonoma.org](http://www.capsonoma.org)

**Pediatric Dental Initiative (PDI):** Sedated dentistry for children ages 1-6 or with developmental disabilities up to age 14. Call 838-6560. [www.pedidental.org](http://www.pedidental.org)

## Sippy cups and tooth decay

Most parents are well aware of the importance of taking care of their children's teeth, so it comes as a shock when they learn their toddler has cavities during a checkup. Tooth decay among young children is on the rise—and many experts believe that sippy cups containing sugary beverages are the causes.

To help parents reduce the risk of cavities in children, First 5 Sonoma County offers parents the following guidelines on using sippy cups properly:

- The sippy cup is a training tool to help children transition from a bottle or breastfeeding to a cup. It should not be used for a long period of time - it's not a bottle and it's not a pacifier.
- Unless being used at mealtime, the sippy cup should only be filled with water. Frequent drinking of any other liquid, even if diluted, from a bottle or no-spill training cup should be avoided.
- Sippy cups should not be used at naptime or bedtime unless they contain only water.

## Thumb, finger and pacifier habits

Sucking on fingers, pacifiers or other objects is completely normal for babies and young children. It provides security. For young babies, it's a way to make contact with and learn about the world. In fact, babies begin to suck on their fingers or thumbs even before they are born.

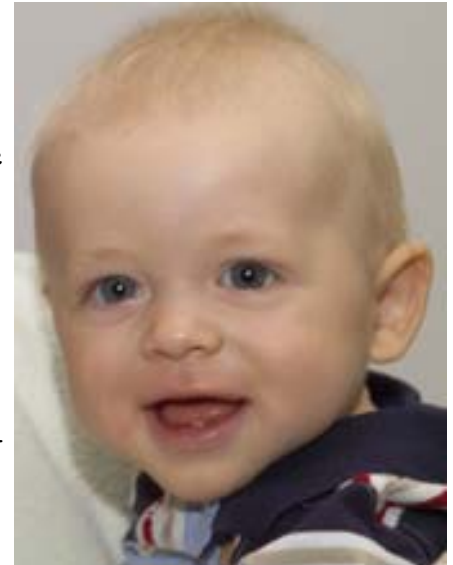
Most children stop sucking on thumbs, pacifiers or other objects on their own between two and four years of age. No harm is done to their teeth or jaws. However, some children continuously suck on a finger, pacifier or other object beyond age four. In these children, the upper front teeth may tip toward the lip or not come in properly.

When your child is old enough to understand the possible results of a sucking habit, your dentist can help by encouraging her to stop, as well as talking about what happens to her teeth if she doesn't stop. This advice, coupled with support from parents and caregivers, helps most children quit. If this approach doesn't work, your dentist may recommend a mouth appliance that blocks sucking habits.

## Cavity-causing bacteria and teeth-friendly snacks

Routine practices, such as providing snacks and sharing utensils, may increase children's risk of developing cavities.

A national survey, conducted by Harris Interactive and commissioned by the AAPD, found that 96% of U.S. adults with children under 12 years old in their household thought a cracker was better for children's teeth than a piece of caramel. The truth is that starch in the cracker can lead to cavities just as



sugar in the candy can, and caramels dissolve more quickly from the mouth than crackers. The longer children's teeth are exposed to the food, the more damage is done, so a cracker is not a teeth-friendly snack.

Did you know that you can spread cavities to your children, just like they can catch a cold or the flu from you? Children are not born with cavity-causing bacteria in their mouths, and babies and small children can actually "catch" bacteria from their caregivers. Sharing utensils or letting children put their fingers in your mouth can transfer bacteria in your saliva, which can cause tooth decay.

Cavities and other dental health issues not only affect your child's ability to speak and maintain a healthy self-image, but they can contribute to systemic health problems later in life, such as diabetes or cardiovascular disease. This is why these simple things you can do to protect your child's teeth are so important.

Source: American Association of Pediatric Dentistry  
[www.aapd.org](http://www.aapd.org)

## About First 5 Sonoma County

First 5 Sonoma County funds children's health insurance and programs that improve childcare quality, help children succeed in school, and help parents provide safe and nurturing environments for their children. For more information on *First 5 Sonoma County* and its programs, please call 565-6626 or visit [www.first5sonomacounty.org](http://www.first5sonomacounty.org)