

# ORAL HEALTH: Good Dental Hygiene Begins Before The Teeth Come In

## February is National Children's Dental Health Month

by Dr. Brad Edgren

**G**ood dental health begins at birth. A child is born with 20 baby teeth already developing in the alveolar bone of the jaws. These teeth don't generally start to erupt into the mouth until six months of age. However, it is not unusual for some children to get their first tooth around age one.

It is important to promote good oral hygiene immediately after birth, even though the baby teeth may not be present. A clean, moist washcloth is all that is needed to wipe off an infant's gums twice daily. Baby teeth are susceptible to decay as they erupt into the oral cavity. Consequently, The American Dental Association recommends that a child have their first dental appointment by one year of age. This is also why brushing with a small, soft bristled toothbrush and a rice sized bead of fluoridated toothpaste twice a day is important during and after tooth eruption. Flossing once a day becomes necessary when two adjacent baby teeth touch. Children should always be carefully monitored when brushing their teeth, ensuring they are using the appropriate amount of toothpaste and not swallowing it. By age three, a larger amount of toothpaste approximating the size of a pea is an appropriate amount.

Baby teeth are not only important for chewing and speaking, but also for maintaining the space necessary for the developing permanent, adult teeth. Tooth decay is one of the leading causes for the premature loss of baby teeth. Early loss of baby teeth can lead to crowding of the adult teeth and malocclusions (bad bites) because the adjacent permanent teeth drift into the vacated space, blocking the proper eruption of other permanent teeth. The American Association of Orthodontists recommends that a child be seen by an orthodontist by age seven to evaluate for dental crowding and potentially developing malocclusions.

Dental plaque contains harmful bacteria that results in dental decay and gingivitis. Poor hygiene, including the lack of brushing, leads to the accumulation of excessive plaque around the teeth and gums. Dental decay and gingivitis are often painless processes that, when left untreated, can develop into

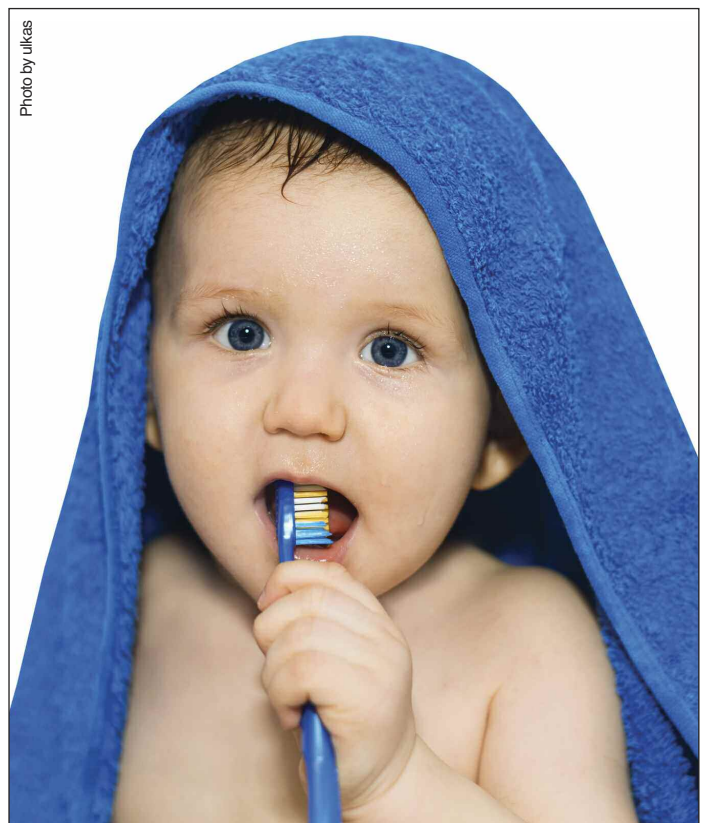


Photo by ulkas

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more serious oral problems including jaw pain, tooth abscesses, jaw bone infections, periodontal disease, and tooth loss. Furthermore, many scientific studies have suggested relationships between the harmful bacteria connected with periodontal disease and certain health problems including diabetes, osteoporosis,

endocarditis, and cardiovascular disease. This is why it is important to see your dentist every 6 months no matter your age. He or she can help monitor and ensure optimum oral health. A healthy mouth promotes a healthy body. **G**

*Bradford N. Edgren DDS, MS, FACD, FICD, Diplomate, American Board of Orthodontics, 3400 W. 16th St. Bldg 4-V, Greeley.*

### Resources for additional information:

[www.ada.org/en/public-programs/mouthhealthy](http://www.ada.org/en/public-programs/mouthhealthy)

[www.aaoinfo.org](http://www.aaoinfo.org)

[www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/dental/art-20047475](http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/dental/art-20047475)