

Inside!
Get your handy
clip-out guide to oral
health resources!



Healthy Teeth, Happy Child



FIRST5
TULARE COUNTY



Give the Gift of Smiles

You and First 5 can help your child grow a bright smile

by Shannon Springmeyer

Tooth decay is the most common disease for children from birth to age 5. By the time they reach kindergarten, more than half of California children have experienced tooth decay, and about one-third of them enter school with untreated cavities, according to the California Dental Association. Untreated tooth decay can have far-reaching effects on a child, leading to pain and problems with nutrition, growth, school readiness and speech.

That's why First 5 Tulare County makes oral health a priority.

"When we learned that dental decay was the most common infectious disease among children ages 0 to 5, we simply had to address it," says Janet Hogan, Executive Director of First 5 Tulare County. First 5 California was created when voters approved Proposition 10 in 1998, providing funding for First 5 organizations in each county. First 5 is dedicated to improving the overall health, well-being and school readiness of California's children 5 and younger.

Oral health is so critical in those first years because it affects a child's overall health and development, Hogan says, with "potentially serious health impacts."

"There can be systemic issues when a cavity becomes infected and not treated," Hogan says. "Poor oral health at a young age is also directly linked to poor oral health as an adult."

Fortunately, dental problems are largely preventable. The caregiver's role in preventing dental problems can't be underestimated, Hogan says. Parents need to become comfortable looking into their child's mouth from a very young age for signs of decay, and need to care for a child's teeth while he or she is too young to do so. This begins shortly after birth, with parents wiping a baby's gums with a soft, moistened cloth after feedings, and continues all the way to supervising a child's brushing until age 7. Ensuring proper nutrition, instilling good oral care habits, and limiting or eliminating sugary drinks, especially between

"When we learned that dental decay was the most common infectious disease among children ages 0 to 5, we simply had to address it."

Janet Hogan,
Executive Director, First 5 Tulare County

meals or at bedtime, also play a part. Parents should also take children to see a dentist by a child's first tooth or first birthday, whichever happens first.

But parents aren't alone in ensuring good dental health for their children. First 5 Tulare County provides education, a connection to dental health care providers, and materials for parents. First 5 Tulare County also sponsors school-based programs that educate children on good oral health habits and provide screenings, fluoride varnish, and referrals for restoration treatments.

"We are reaching out to pretty much all of the preschools and kindergarten classrooms around the county," Hogan says. "Literally thousands of children are screened every year between the programs we fund."

The benefits speak for themselves. A healthy mouth leads to kids chewing food and speaking easily, smiling with confidence, and concentrating better at school without the distraction of painful cavities. And a strong start to oral health helps give a child a lifetime of smiles.

Why is oral health so important in the first five years of life?

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"Early childhood caries (cavities) is the No. 1 chronic disease affecting young children today. This is five times more common than asthma and seven times more common than hay fever. Dental problems can also affect the self-esteem of a child, making them reluctant to smile or engage in conversation. Dental education and prevention play an important role in children's overall health and well-being. Developing good dental habits at an early age will ensure that children grow up with healthy teeth and gums. Children should have their teeth brushed as soon as they appear and should begin regular dental visits by age 1. Creating an environment not only in the home but in the community that encourages proper dental hygiene including brushing and flossing, regular dental office visits, a balanced nutritional diet, and reinforcing why daily care is critical will provide a child with overall long-term health."

— Henry Cisneros, D.D.S.
Chief Clinical Officer for Family
HealthCare Network



PHOTO COURTESY OF FAMILY
HEALTHCARE NETWORK

Problems to Avoid

by Meredith J. Graham

PROBLEM:

Early childhood caries, or baby bottle tooth decay



CONSEQUENCES IF NOT TREATED EARLY

- » Cavities
- » Primary teeth fall out early
- » Secondary teeth come in misplaced
- » Toothaches
- » Speech problems
- » Malnutrition due to difficulty chewing
- » Low self-esteem

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- » Brush! Use clean gauze on gums, move up to a toothbrush and a smear of toothpaste when teeth come in, and at around age 2, start adding a pea-sized amount of toothpaste
- » Never let a baby sleep with a bottle of milk or juice in its mouth
- » Teach your child to brush — supervise until age 7
- » Avoid sugary drinks and snacks, especially between meals



PROBLEM:

Not enough fluoride

CONSEQUENCES IF NOT TREATED EARLY

- » Teeth that are fragile
- » White spots on teeth that turn to black spots
- » Increased risk of tooth decay

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- » Give child fluoride supplements
- » Use fluoride toothpaste once child is old enough not to swallow it
- » See dentist every six months for fluoride treatment

PROBLEM:

Malocclusion, or bad bite



CONSEQUENCES IF NOT TREATED EARLY

- » Jaw does not develop properly
- » Speech problems
- » Malnutrition due to difficulty chewing
- » Teeth crowding, increasing risk for gum disease and cavities

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- » Discourage thumb-sucking after permanent teeth come in
- » Talk to dentist about space-maintainers if baby teeth fall out early
- » Consider braces to correct the problem

As a pediatrician, Dr. Marta Atalla regularly checks patients' teeth for signs of decay.

PHOTO BY JACQUES GROSS



A Little Brushing Goes a Long Way

Kids who don't take care of their teeth suffer consequences into adulthood

by Meredith J. Graham

As a pediatrician, Dr. Marta Atalla sees a lot of kids with the sniffles, with aches and pains and everything in between. But when it comes to dental issues, a few cases stand out in her mind.

The first was an 18-year-old girl who came into Dr. Atalla's office looking for Vicodin to ease her toothache. When she got a good look inside the girl's mouth, Dr. Atalla was astounded. What few teeth were left were badly decayed, she said.

"I had to send her to an oral surgeon to remove the rest of her teeth. She didn't have even one good tooth."

The result? Dentures. At age 18.

"She was depressed," Dr. Atalla says. "We had to treat her for depression, too."

The girl had cited a lack of health insurance for her predicament, but Dr. Atalla didn't buy it. The real problem, she says, was a lack of dental hygiene — she'd probably never been shown how to brush her teeth or floss when she was young.

"If you take care of your teeth, even without going to the dentist, you can avoid these problems," Dr. Atalla says.

Dr. Atalla is a native of Poland but has been living in the United States for nine years. She recently made the

move from Arkansas to Tulare County, where she's a pediatrician for the Tulare Community Health Clinic.

One of the biggest problems Dr. Atalla sees in children as young as 15 months is simple tooth decay — also known as early childhood caries or baby bottle tooth decay. It can result from sugar or juice in the bottle, from not enough fluoride or even from germs transferred from mom's mouth to baby's.

"When you have tooth decay that starts that early," all kinds of problems can arise, Dr. Atalla says. "Bad teeth will come out earlier, affecting how secondary teeth come in."

In short, problems don't end once permanent teeth come in. So, it's important for parents to take care of their kids' teeth from infancy.

Dr. Atalla recalled a parent who brought in her 4-year-old son with a swollen jaw. She looked in the boy's mouth and saw what she described as a

"severely abscessed tooth." It was clear that the mother had not been taking care of her son's dental hygiene. The tooth ultimately had to be pulled, and the boy was put under general anesthesia for the procedure.

"Tooth decay can be treated — if we catch it early," she said.

"Tooth decay can be treated — if we catch it early."

Dr. Marta Atalla

All Smiles

Toddler discovers dentists aren't so scary after all

by Edgar Sanchez

The first time his parents took Andres "Andy" Sanchez to the dentist, the then 2-year-old screamed, "No, no, no!" outside the clinic, refusing to go in. He burst into tears and clung to his mom and dad until they gave up and took him home.

Young Andy's fear of new and different experiences, such as visiting the dentist, is not altogether uncommon. Andy is a pretty typical little boy. He has an ever-expanding vocabulary of about 40 words, ranging from "hello" to "table." He likes to draw. Because he is hearing-impaired, he is learning sign language.

Angelica took the information but still felt somewhat reluctant. However, Andy was now long overdue for his first dental checkup, which should occur by a child's first birthday or first tooth. The risk of problems that could arise if Andy did not receive dental care eventually outweighed her fears. Untreated cavities in young children can lead to a host of problems, including pain, improper speech and chewing, low self-esteem and poor general health. Finally, after many months, she phoned Dr. Barnes.

This time, everything went smoothly. Andy, then 3, exchanged smiles with Dr. Barnes, who found that the boy had a minor cavity. Barnes fixed it, after placing Andy asleep with the help of an anesthesiologist. General anesthesia is sometimes necessary to treat dental problems in very young children. Throughout the visit, the cooperative Andy displayed no fear.

"When Andy woke up, he said that someone had put a plastic mask on his face and that he had fallen asleep," Angelica says. "Then he beamed and displayed his teeth."

She regretted that she and her husband had waited so long. What made the visit a success, Angelica says, was the superbly friendly attitude of Dr. Barnes and his staff. They made her son feel like a little prince.

"Andy was a normal, happy kid," Dr. Barnes says. And now that he has a healthy smile, he can stay that way.

"Oral health is extremely important for young children," Dr. Barnes notes. "An infected tooth can affect the whole body, not just the mouth."

Untreated cavities in young children can lead to a host of problems.

To better communicate with Andy, his mother, Angelica Sanchez, is also learning sign language through a class at Parenting Network's Visalia Family Resource Center. The resource center is funded in part by First 5 Tulare County and provides an array of support to parents of children with special needs.

On her initial visit to the resource center last December, Angelica's case manager noted that Andy had never received professional dental care, so she immediately referred the youngster to Dr. Richard Barnes, a dentist in Visalia who accepts Medi-Cal patients.

Happy Teeth From the Very Beginning

by Meredith J. Graham

» While they may not become visible until your child is about 6 months old, teeth begin to form between months three and six of pregnancy. Here are a few tips to help make sure your child has a healthy mouth from the very beginning:



While pregnant, make sure you're getting plenty of vitamins A, D and C; calcium; folic acid; phosphorous; and protein, which will help your baby develop strong, healthy teeth.



Brush twice a day, with a fluoride toothpaste, and floss daily to decrease risk of dental disease during pregnancy and risk of early childhood caries in your baby.



Avoid sugary snacks and drinks. Choose milk or water over soda or juice.



After birth, avoid sharing saliva with your baby (i.e., don't put her pacifier in your mouth). Bacteria in your mouth that cause tooth decay can be transferred to your child.



Clean baby's gums with a clean, damp gauze pad or cloth after feedings.



Make an appointment to see a dentist shortly after first teeth appear or by your child's first birthday.



Angelica Sanchez assists her sons, Ismael Jr., 7, and Andy, 3, as they brush their teeth. Parents should supervise their children's toothbrushing through age 7. PHOTO BY JOHANNA COYNE



Karen O'Connor looks at a child's teeth during a health fair at Porterville Veterans Park. O'Connor says fluoride helps remineralize teeth, making them stronger and less susceptible to cavities. PHOTO BY JACQUES GROSS

Making Teeth STRONG

Dental hygienist turned educator talks about fluoride

by Mike Blount

Karen O'Connor knows fluoride helps make teeth stronger. As a dental hygienist for seven years, she helped hundreds of children keep their teeth strong by using fluoride applications. Now, as an educator for the Kinder Care Dental Program funded by First 5 Tulare County, she wants them to know why fluoride is important to their oral health. O'Connor says fluoride keeps teeth strong by reinforcing them. It makes teeth less susceptible to harmful acids that can break down tooth enamel. Once tooth enamel is broken down, it can lead to cavities.

"Fluoride is a defense mechanism against these things — especially in children," O'Connor says. "Having poor oral health can affect their overall health and learning ability. If they're in a lot of pain, they're not going to be able to concentrate at school. Their nutrition could be affected because they can't eat harder foods. Their self-esteem could be affected because they are being teased. Fluoride can help prevent these things."

Children also are more prone to drinking fruit juices and eating candy, which are highly acidic.

"Fluoride is a defense mechanism against these things — especially in children. Having poor oral health can affect their overall health and learning ability."

Karen O'Connor,
registered dental hygienist and educator

O'Connor says using fluoride is especially important for children because their teeth are not as strong to handle eating these foods as adult teeth.

There are several different ways to use fluoride.

O'Connor tells parents and children to get in the habit of going to the dentist twice a year, where the dentist will typically give the patient a fluoride rinse or apply a fluoride varnish. Fluoride programs are also available in schools that supply fluoride rinses and teach children how to "rinse and spit."

O'Connor says there are fluoride rinses parents can purchase over the counter, so they can get their children to use fluoride at home. She also recommends using fluoride toothpaste. For an infant, O'Connor says using a smear of fluoride toothpaste is sufficient. For a small child, parents should use a pea-sized amount on a soft toothbrush.

"As soon as teeth start erupting, you can start using fluoride," O'Connor says. "When you have children who have strong teeth, they are happier and more productive."

Beyond the Brush

by Mike Blount

Teaching your children to brush their teeth twice a day will form the cornerstone of good oral health, but there are many other things you can teach them to keep their teeth and gums healthy and strong.

- 1

Make sure your child visits the dentist twice a year. Make an appointment after his or her first tooth erupts or by the first birthday.
- 2

Floss once a day with your child as soon as he or she has two teeth that are touching.
- 3

Avoid too much soda, carbonated drinks and acidic drinks.
- 4

Use a fluoride rinse.
- 5

For children still using a bottle, fill it with only water before bedtime.
- 6

Avoid hard foods, sugary snacks and candy.
- 7

Teach your child to brush twice a day with fluoride toothpaste. For children 2 and older, use a pea-sized drop on a soft toothbrush.
- 8

Replace your child's toothbrush every three to four months, or as soon as the bristles become frayed.
- 9

Avoid testing food for your child to see if it's too hot. Bacteria can be transmitted from your mouth to your child's mouth.
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Caring for Your Child's Teeth

Dentists Richard Barnes and George Wilson discuss the importance of preventative dental care for children

by MIKE BLOUNT

Q: WHY DOES DENTAL CARE MATTER FOR SMALL CHILDREN — ESPECIALLY IF THE BABY TEETH JUST FALL OUT?

Barnes: Baby teeth maintain a space for permanent teeth, and some of those teeth may be in the mouth of a child until 12 years of age. If a tooth gets infected, it can affect the whole body.

Wilson: An infection can also become dangerous very quickly. In third world countries where AIDS is not the primary cause of death, tooth infections usually are the cause of death.

Q: WHEN SHOULD PARENTS FIRST TAKE THEIR CHILD TO THE DENTIST?

Barnes: If you notice any signs of pain or swelling, you should take your child right away. You should also take them if you notice any discoloration of their teeth.

Wilson: The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry recommends your child has a dental home by age 1. Many problems can be averted just by establishing a dental home and making regular visits to the dentist. The idea is really about prevention.

Q: WHAT ARE SOME IMPORTANT STEPS PARENTS CAN TAKE TO PROMOTE GOOD ORAL HEALTH FOR KIDS?

Barnes: Get them into the habit of brushing their teeth regularly and after they eat snacks. Teach them to floss where teeth are touching to avoid decay, and make sure they have a good, healthy diet.

Wilson: Around 33 months, children naturally get the bacteria that causes cavities in their mouths. But we've seen kids that have cavities at 11 months because they've had the bacteria transferred to them. It could come from an adult kissing the child, using the same silverware or testing the child's food to see if it's too hot. It could also come from an older sibling using the same bottle or sippy cup. Try to avoid sharing food and drinks with small children to keep from transferring bacteria.

Q: HOW DOES ORAL HEALTH RELATE TO THE OVERALL HEALTH OF A CHILD?

Barnes: Having healthy teeth and a healthy smile has a positive effect on a child's self-esteem. Making sure that your child has good oral health helps them grow up to be healthy teenagers and helps keep them from being sick or missing school.



Dentists Richard Barnes and George Wilson emphasize the role of prevention in good dental health.
PHOTO BY JOHANNA COYNE

"Taking your child to the dentist and having them form good oral hygiene habits from a young age is the best way to ensure they stay healthy, happy and productive."

George Wilson, D.D.S.

Wilson: If a child is in pain, they can't concentrate in school. If they have bad teeth, they could be embarrassed and avoid interacting with other children. Taking your child to the dentist and having them form good oral hygiene habits from a young age is the best way to ensure they stay healthy, happy and productive.

Quick Tips for Caregivers

DON'T put a baby to bed with a bottle of milk or juice, which leads to cavities.

DO wipe a baby's gums or teeth after bottle-feeding with milk or juice at mealtimes. Provide only water between meals and at bedtime.

DON'T give a child crackers, chips, dry cereal, fruits and sugary snacks between meals. The carbohydrates in these foods promote tooth decay.

DO substitute fresh vegetables like celery sticks or proteins like cheese for between-meal snacking.

Here are some positive changes you can make to promote good oral health for your child!



DON'T choose sugary drinks like soda, juices and sports drinks, especially between meals.

DO give your child water and limit juice to 4 oz. a day, at mealtimes only.

DON'T choose fruit juice, which contains enamel-damaging sugars and acids.

DO choose fresh fruit instead to help your child meet the recommended daily fruit intake.

DON'T clean a baby's pacifier by putting it in your mouth or share utensils with babies or children. You can pass on your cavity-causing bacteria through saliva.

DO offer clean pacifiers, utensils and teething toys.

Healthy Smiles at Every Age!

Get your child off to a healthy start by practicing good oral health habits early. These tips will help you prevent, recognize and get treatment for oral health problems at every age. Keep this clip-out guide handy, so you'll be prepared to help your child have a beautiful, healthy smile.

A clip-out guide for caregivers!

by SHANNON SPRINGMEYER

Stage	What's Happening	Keeping Teeth Healthy	Common Problems	Solutions
Birth	Baby is born with all teeth in place, under the gums.	Begin cleaning baby's mouth within a few days after birth. Wipe the gums with a clean, damp cloth after every feeding from breast or bottle.	Caregivers can pass on their cavity-causing germs to a baby or child.	Don't clean your baby's pacifier with your mouth, kiss baby on the mouth, or share a spoon when tasting baby food.
Teething	Baby's teeth are coming in, pushing through the gums.	Continue wiping the baby's gums after feeding.	Children ages 6 months to 3 years can be uncomfortable and fussy while teething.	To soothe tender gums, provide a clean, cold wet washcloth or chilled teething ring. You can also rub the baby's gums with a clean finger.
First Tooth	The first tooth usually appears around 6 months, but can appear as late as 12-14 months.	- Brush baby teeth after meals with a soft, child-size toothbrush and a smear of toothpaste until age 2. - Take your child to see a dentist at the first birthday or first tooth, whichever comes first. - When your child has two teeth that touch, begin flossing teeth every day.	Early childhood caries, or baby bottle tooth decay, is a serious problem that can have negative effects on oral health into adulthood.	- Never put a child to bed with a bottle containing anything besides water. - Avoid sugary or starchy snacks and drinks between meals. - Look often into your child's mouth. Gently lift the lip and look for white or brown spots on teeth, signs of decay. - Take the child to a dentist immediately if you find any problems.
Age 2	Usually by this age, your child is ready to become more involved in taking care of his or her own teeth.	- Teach your child how to brush properly after breakfast and before bed. Teach her to use a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste and to spit it out when done. - Avoid sharing cups, straws or utensils so you don't pass on your cavity-causing germs.	Children ages 2 to 7 do not always brush properly or thoroughly. They sometimes even "fake brush" with only water!	Supervise and help with brushing until age 7. Correct your child's brushing technique.
Age 3	Teeth are continuing to come in. Keeping baby teeth healthy will help ensure there is enough space for adult teeth to come in.	Teach kids ages 3 and up to rinse and swish vigorously with water after brushing.	Sucking on thumbs or pacifiers is not typically recommended beyond age 3 because it can lead to crooked teeth and a bad bite.	Most children will stop sucking habits on their own between the ages of 2 and 4. If your child needs your help to stop, tell him about the consequences, and ask the dentist for support.
Ages 4 to 7	Continue to build on healthy mouth habits!	- Children should brush twice a day with fluoride toothpaste and floss once a day. - Continue to supervise brushing until age 7. - Check your child's mouth regularly for signs of decay. - Change your child's toothbrush three or four times a year and after every illness.	Between-meal snacking, especially with starchy foods like crackers or sugary drinks and snacks, can lead to decay.	- Give foods and drinks high in carbohydrates and sugars, even fruit sugars, only at mealtimes. - See your dentist about fluoride varnishes and rinses, sealants and other treatments to keep decay at bay.



WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Check out these resources for more information about keeping your child's smile healthy and bright. Keep this clip-out guide handy, so you'll always know where to turn for more information or to find a dentist.

WWW.FIRST5ORALHEALTH.ORG

The site of First Smiles, a First 5 California initiative to fight the silent epidemic of early childhood caries among children ages 0 to 5.

WWW.MOUTHHEALTHY.ORG

Find helpful tips, videos, and info on this website by the American Dental Association. Click on the Pregnancy or Babies and Kids tabs for stage-appropriate help.

WWW.CDA.ORG/PUBLIC-RESOURCES/PATIENT-FACT-SHEETS

This California Dental Association website offers fact sheets on a variety of oral health topics, available in English, Spanish, Hmong, Chinese, Russian and Vietnamese.

WWW.CDA.ORG/CLINICS

Search for California clinics offering free or discounted dental health care.



First 5 Tulare County is an independent public agency aimed at promoting, supporting and improving the early development of children during their first five years of life.

www.first5tc.org

200 N. Santa Fe St., Visalia, CA 93292 559-622-8650 FAX: 559-622-8651

Healthy Smiles For Life

Find a Dentist

A child should see a dentist by the first birthday or first tooth. Contact one of the following local providers to establish a dental home for your child.
ALL PROVIDERS LISTED ACCEPT MEDI-CAL.

Tulare Community Health Clinic

www.tchci.com | 559-686-9097
1101 N. Cherry St., Tulare, CA 93274

Family HealthCare Network

www.fhcn.org | 877-960-3426
Multiple Locations

Visalia Children's Dental Surgery Center Inc.

www.thechildrensdentalsurgerycenter1.com
559-625-9300
136 N. Aspen Court, Visalia, CA 93277

Hapy Bear Surgery Center

www.happybear.com | 559-732-4279
1979 Hillman St., Tulare, CA 93274

Dr. George Wilson

559-781-9117
380 W. Putnam Ave.,
Porterville, CA 93257

Dr. Richard Barnes

2626 S. Mooney Blvd.
Visalia, CA 93277
Dental Associates, Suite A
559-733-1250
Surgery Center, Suite C
559-635-0206

Free Kit!

First 5 Tulare County offers a free kit for new parents, including an oral health kit with dental health information and tools for children ages infant to 5 years.
Visit www.first5tc.org
or call 559-622-8650
to get yours!



Tulare-Kings Dental Society

www.tularekingsds.com | 559-625-9333