

# Toothbrushing Tips for Parents and Caregivers



Your role as a parent includes keeping your child's teeth clean and healthy and free from tooth decay. It can be challenging to brush infants' and toddlers' teeth, but it's important to do because decay can start easily and develop very quickly in children's teeth.

## Brushing your baby's teeth

- Begin brushing your child's teeth as soon as their first tooth appears.
- Use a soft, baby-size toothbrush. Do not share toothbrushes among family members.
- Use a tiny smear of fluoride toothpaste, the size of a grain of rice.
- Brush twice a day; before bed is especially important.
- Brush where the teeth and gums meet.
- Lift your child's lip regularly. Look closely along the gum line. Call your dentist if you notice any white or brown spots, or anything unusual.
- Take your baby to see a dentist once their first tooth comes in or by the time they are one year old.



## How to position your child for tooth brushing



Find a comfortable position. It is often easiest to brush your child's teeth when the child is lying down. You will see better and do a better job. It may be helpful to have another adult hold the child's hands, or swaddle younger children to keep them from grabbing hands or moving around too much.

Try these positions:

- Lay your child on a change table, making sure they cannot fall off.
- Place your child on a couch or bed, with their head in your lap.
- Lay your child on the floor with their head placed between your legs.

## Cleaning your toddler's teeth



- Use a child-size toothbrush with soft bristles. Do not share toothbrushes.
  - Use a tiny smear of fluoride toothpaste and gradually increase to a small pea-sized amount by age three.
    - Brush twice a day; before bed is especially important.
    - Brush the tongue, the top of the tooth and both sides of the tooth; remember to brush where the teeth and gums meet.
    - Brush for at least two minutes.
    - Gums that bleed need to be brushed more often—not harder.
  - Gently floss between teeth that are touching.
- Take your child to the dentist regularly.

### Remember!

- Young children cannot clean their own teeth. Brush **for** them when they are very young and brush **with** them as they grow older.
- Children over age eight can brush on their own with your supervision.
- Always use toothpaste with fluoride. Fluoride strengthens tooth enamel and helps prevent tooth decay.
- Encourage children to spit out toothpaste and keep it out of their reach.
- Offer water when your child is thirsty. Discourage grazing on foods and sipping on sugary drinks between meals and snacks. This causes ongoing acid attacks on teeth, which can cause teeth to decay.
- Make sure you look after your own teeth and gums. Adults with decay or infection in their mouth can pass bacteria to children by sharing toothbrushes or spoons and by cleaning soothers in their own mouths.
- Be a great role model: children want to brush their teeth when they see you brushing your own.



**Dental disease is largely preventable.**

For more tips on caring for your child's teeth, talk to your dentist or visit [yourdentalhealth.ca](http://yourdentalhealth.ca).



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