

Thumb Sucking and Pacifier Use

How Can Thumb Sucking Affect My Child's Teeth? After permanent teeth come in, sucking may cause problems with the proper growth of the mouth and alignment of the teeth. It can also cause changes in the roof of the mouth.

Pacifiers can affect the teeth in essentially the same ways as sucking fingers and thumbs, but it is often an easier habit to break. The intensity of the sucking is a factor that determines whether or not dental problems may result.

How can I help my child stop thumb sucking and pacifier use?

- Praise your child for not sucking. Children often suck their thumbs when feeling insecure or needing comfort. Focus on correcting the cause of the anxiety, and provide comfort to your child.
- For an older child, involve him or her in choosing the method of stopping.
- Your dentist can offer encouragement to your child and explain what could happen to their teeth if they do not stop sucking.



A HEALTHY MOUTH: An Important Part of Your Child's Wellness



ORAL HEALTH OFFICE
Promoting Smiles Across a Lifetime

For more information on childhood oral health,
visit our website at www.alabamapublichealth.gov/oralhealth

Dental Visit

When to visit a dentist?

The American Dental Association recommends the first dental visit should take place once the first tooth appears but no later than the first birthday. Why so early? As soon as your baby has teeth, he or she can get cavities.

What to expect at the first visit:

EXAMINATION

Your dentist will perform a thorough examination of your child's teeth, gums, and mouth, looking for signs of disease or other problems. His or her goal is to help maintain good oral health and to prevent problems from becoming serious, by identifying and treating them as soon as possible.

X-RAYS

Depending on your child's age, risks of disease, and symptoms, your dentist may recommend X-rays. X-rays can diagnose problems otherwise unnoticed, such as damage to jawbones, impacted teeth, abscesses, cysts or tumors, and decay between the teeth.

CLEANING

Checkups almost always include a complete cleaning from your dentist or a dental hygienist. Using special instruments, a dental hygienist will scrape below the gum line, removing built-up plaque and tartar that can cause gum disease, cavities, bad breath, and other problems. Your dentist or hygienist may also polish and floss your child's teeth.

What is a Cavity?

Cavities refer to tooth decay, which occurs when specific types of bacteria (plaque) produce acid that destroys the tooth's enamel. Cavities are more common among children, but changes that occur with aging make cavities an adult problem too.

How to avoid cavities:

- A child's diet is very important for their teeth.
- Wean your child off of bottle-feeding when possible, and teach them to drink from a baby cup.
- Limit children to 3 meals and 2 snacks per day.
- Avoid foods high in sugar.
- Choose healthy snacks like fruits and vegetables.
- DRINK FLUORIDATED TAP WATER!
- Avoid letting your child drink juice and soft drinks.
- DO NOT PUT YOUR BABY TO BED WITH A BOTTLE!



Dental Emergencies

Accidents can happen anywhere, anytime. Knowing how to handle a dental emergency can mean the difference between saving and losing your child's permanent tooth. For all dental emergencies, it is important to call your dentist as soon as it happens or go to your nearest emergency room.

KNOCKED-OUT TOOTH - Keep the tooth moist at all times. If you can, try placing the tooth back in the socket without touching the root. If that's not possible, place it between your cheek and gums or in milk. CALL YOUR DENTIST.

FRACTURED TOOTH - Immediately rinse your mouth with warm water to clean the area. Put cold compresses on the face to keep swelling down. CALL YOUR DENTIST.

INJURIES TO TONGUE/LIP/CHEEK - Clean the area gently with water and apply a cold compress. See your dentist or go to the emergency room if there is excessive bleeding that won't stop or you are in a lot of pain.

TOOTHACHE - Rinse mouth with warm water to clean it out. Gently use floss to remove any food caught between teeth. DO NOT PUT ASPIRIN on aching tooth or gum tissues. It may burn gum tissue. CALL YOUR DENTIST.

- Flossing regularly can build good habits for the future.
- Children should be assisted by an adult.
- **SEALANTS** - Dental sealants are a quick, easy, and painless way to help prevent cavities.
- Dental sealants are thin plastic coatings that are applied to the grooves in the chewing surface of the back teeth (molars) to protect them from tooth decay for many years.
- School age children (ages 6-11) without sealants have 3 times as many cavities in the first molars as children who do have sealants.



- **BRUSHING** - Children's teeth should be brushed twice a day, especially before bed.
- Brushing teeth is important as it removes plaque (bacteria) from the surface of the teeth.
- Effective tooth brushing requires parent supervision and assistance.
- Start brushing your child's teeth as soon as they appear.
- Choose a toothbrush with a small head and soft bristles.
- Use age-appropriate fluoride toothpaste.