

## Going to the Dentist

Some people think children don't need to see a dentist while they still have baby teeth. Healthy baby teeth are important for healthy permanent teeth. A child should first visit the dentist around six months after the first tooth erupts and then continue regular visits every six months. With regular check-ups and good dental health, he may not need treatment and won't mind going to the dentist. Here are some tips to make your visit easier:

### ***Make a "practice" visit to the dentist.***

Take your child with you to your dental appointment or one of your older children's appointments.

Introduce the dentist. "This is Dr. T. He wants to help you keep your teeth strong and healthy."

Let the child see the office, sit in the chair and look at the dentist's tools: mirror, tooth counter, air and water squirter, and tooth cleaner.

### ***Practice what you do at the dentist's office.***

TALK about sitting in the dental chair and putting on a bib ("So you won't get toothpaste on your shirt").

PRACTICE opening his mouth and looking at his teeth and brushing them. If your child doesn't like to brush, have him brush YOUR teeth before you brush his.

PRETEND you are going to the dentist. First, you are the dentist. Show your child what to expect. Then, you be the patient and let your child pretend to be the dentist.

"Open your mouth real wide and let me see your teeth. That's very good."

"Now I'm going to brush your teeth with my special tooth brush."

"Now I'm going to squirt some water in your mouth. That tickles, doesn't it?"

"Now I'm going to take a picture of your teeth."

### ***Give a short warning before an appointment.***

"This afternoon you get to go to the dentist."

### ***Make appointments at times when your child will be rested and not hungry.***

Feed first, then brush teeth as a practice before you go.

### ***Take along a stuffed animal, favorite toy or something to do.***

This helps so your child is not bored and irritable. Distract him with things at the office.

### ***Have a positive attitude.***

Keep negative feelings and past experiences to yourself.

"You are a big boy now. You can help Dr. T take care of your teeth." Don't call your child a "baby" or "sissy."

### ***Never threaten your child with bad things.***

Don't say, "If you don't behave, the dentist will pull your teeth out," or "He will give you a shot." Don't argue or bribe your child. He doesn't have a choice about going to the dentist.

***Understand that your child may be afraid.***

Listen and talk about his fears.

"Are you afraid to go because you think it will hurt? When I was your age, I took my teddy bear with me. He helped me be brave. You are brave, too."

"Will it hurt? "I don't know, but Dr. T will tell you what you will feel and how long it will take."

***Be kind and understanding.***

Be honest, direct and matter-of-fact.

"You need to have this done. The dentist is going to help you."

Reassure whenever possible.

TALK about what is happening. PRAISE your child for doing the best he could.

Give lots of HUGS!

***Read helpful books with your child:***

- *"Going to the Dentist"* by Fred Rogers (New York: Putnam, 1989)
- *"The Berenstain Bears Visit the Dentist"* by Stan & Jan Berenstain (New York: Random House, 1981)

**Tips for healthy teeth:**

- See "**Dental Health**" CARE CARD.
- Brush teeth twice a day. After age 4, floss every day.
- Rinse your mouth with water after eating food if you can't brush.
- Stop the bottle at one year of age.
- Eat a good diet with limited sweets, sugary drinks and fruit juice.

**Call your child's dentist if your child:**

- Has a toothache.
- Falls and cracks a tooth.