Children need healthy baby teeth to:
- Chew and eat food.
- Grow and learn.
- Speak clearly.
- Sleep well.
- Smile and feel good about how they look.
- Guide adult teeth into place.

Did you know some baby teeth stay in the mouth until age 12 years old? Tooth decay (cavities) on baby teeth can spread to adult teeth. It is important to keep baby teeth healthy as every child is at risk for tooth decay.

**Healthy Baby Teeth**
Teeth are clean.
Visit the dentist regularly.

**Early Tooth Decay**
Appears as white or chalky areas usually near the gums.
This can be healed with fluoride.
See a dental professional as soon as possible.

**Tooth Decay**
Appears as yellow, brown or black areas.
This should be treated even if there is no pain.
Children may not be able to say when they have tooth pain.
Children with serious tooth decay may need surgery.
See a dental professional immediately.

Things to know about tooth decay:
- Tooth decay can start as soon as teeth come into the mouth.
- Bacteria that cause tooth decay can spread from other mouths to your child’s mouth by sharing saliva.
- Tooth decay can cause pain and infection and can affect overall health.

TOOTH DECAY CAN BE PREVENTED.
See our tips on the back

Government Dental Benefit
[https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/managing-your-health/family/child-teen-health/dental-eyeglasses](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/managing-your-health/family/child-teen-health/dental-eyeglasses)

Take your child to see a dentist by their first birthday
Visit [www.bcdental.org](http://www.bcdental.org) to “Find A Dentist”
How to Prevent Tooth Decay

Start healthy habits early

- Reduce the transfer of bacteria that causes tooth decay by having all family members brush and floss their own teeth daily and visit a dentist regularly.
- Wipe baby's gums with a clean moist cloth daily even before teeth come in.
- Do not put anything sweet on a soother.
- Teach baby to drink from an open cup at 6-9 months old.
- Offer only plain water in the night and between meals and snacks after 12 months.

As soon as teeth come in:

- Brush teeth with a small, soft toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste 2 times daily.
- Brush along the gums on all sides of the teeth, and the chewing surface of the back teeth.
- Floss once daily where teeth are touching side by side.
- Brush and floss for your child until they are about 8 years old.
- Set a good example. Children need to see family members brush and floss daily.
- When adult molars come in, ask your dentist about dental sealants.

Fluoride toothpaste is safe to use as soon as teeth come in!
Fluoride is a mineral. It naturally makes teeth stronger and helps prevents tooth decay. Our public water supply does not have fluoride added so it’s important to use fluoride toothpaste.

0-3 years old
Use a rice grain sized amount

3+ years old
Use a pea sized amount

Healthy Eating Habits for Healthy Teeth

The bacteria in our mouths use sugars and starches to make an acid that damages teeth every time we eat or drink. Sipping drinks other than water and snacking too often may cause tooth decay.

- Aim to serve 3 meals and 2-3 planned snacks each day.
- Offer a variety of healthy foods.
- Limit sticky, sugary foods.
- Avoid sweet drinks including 100% fruit juice, sweetened milk, or sweetened plant-based beverages.

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The information in this document is intended solely for the person to whom it was given by the health care team.

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