

From the office of:

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I **Fact Sheet** Plaque and Oral Hygiene I

Prevent Plaque With Good Oral Hygiene

It's important to keep your children's teeth clean and healthy, and you can help do this by teaching them how to reduce the amount of plaque on their teeth. To learn more about plaque, read on!

What is plaque?

Plaque is a sticky layer of bacteria-containing film that accumulates on teeth, especially in places where toothbrushes can't reach. Many of the foods that children eat cause the bacteria in the mouth to produce acids. Sugary foods are obvious sources of plaque, but starches—such as bread, crackers, and cereal—also can cause acids to form.

How does plaque affect the mouth?

Plaque produces bacteria that irritate the gums, making them red, sensitive, and susceptible to bleeding. Consistent plaque buildup can cause tooth enamel to wear away, which will result in cavities. Plaque that is not removed with thorough daily brushing and cleaning between teeth eventually can harden into calculus or tartar. This makes it more difficult to keep the teeth clean.

When tartar collects above the gumline, the gum tissue can become swollen and may bleed easily. This is called gingivitis, the early stage of gum disease. You can prevent plaque buildup and keep teeth cavity-free by regularly visiting the dentist, brushing twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste, and cleaning between the teeth with dental floss daily.

How can I reduce the plaque on my child's teeth?

The best way to remove plaque is by teaching your child to brush his or her teeth for at least two minutes twice per day. Brushing removes the plaque from tooth surfaces. Be sure to show your child how to use a soft-bristled toothbrush, and instruct him or her to use a proper circular motion when brushing teeth and gums. Make sure to teach your child to brush the tongue as well; this removes bacteria and freshens breath.

You can teach your child to remove plaque from between his or her teeth by using floss once a day. Start flossing between your child's teeth as soon as he or she has two teeth



that touch each other (after he or she is 1 year old). Your child should continue to floss as he or she grows older so that it becomes part of his or her oral hygiene routine. In addition to brushing, daily flossing is essential for preventing tooth decay and gum disease.

How can my child maintain good oral hygiene?

Lead by example and practice good oral hygiene yourself! Teach your child about the importance of good oral hygiene, and be sure that your child brushes his or her teeth for at least two minutes twice per day. In addition to brushing, your child should floss at least once per day.

Further, be sure that you take your child to the dentist for cleanings and checkups. Getting your child's teeth cleaned regularly can help prevent gum disease, remove tartar and plaque buildup, and eliminate stains that regular brushing and flossing can't. Your dentist also can examine your child's entire mouth and detect issues early—before they become bigger, more painful problems.

For more oral hygiene tips, talk to your dentist or visit KnowYourTeeth.com.



KnowYourTeeth.com

Brought to you by the Academy of General Dentistry (AGD), this website answers important dental health questions, offers the latest information on current treatments, provides tips for first-rate oral hygiene, and helps visitors find highly qualified general dentists near where they live.

The AGD is a member of the Partnership for Healthy Mouths, Healthy Lives, a first-of-its-kind national dental coalition composed of 35 leading dental health organizations. Look for more information about the Kids' Healthy Mouths campaign at www.2min2x.org.

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