

THE FIRST DENTAL VISIT

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Most parents believe that a child's first dental visit should be after all of their primary teeth have erupted. That belief has been supported by most of the dental community and pediatricians alike until recently.

Currently, the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry recommends that all children have their first dental visit by their first birthday. The main reason for this visit is to do a visual examination of the child to screen for dental decay and normal oral cavity development; including normal tooth eruption, head and neck abnormalities, and risk assessment of developing dental disease.

Normally during the first visit the parent will hold the child on their lap, while reclining so that the Dentist may do a visual exam. Another strategy includes using "knee to knee" positioning. This involves the child lying in the dentist's lap with the parent facing the dentist with knee's touching. In this position, the parent can hold the child's hands and legs steady for safety.

Since dental decay can progress very rapidly in children, certain risk factors can be evaluated and discussed with the parents and preventative strategies can be implemented into the daily routine. These strategies may include: daily oral hygiene instructions, dietary guidelines, fluoride supplementation, and assessment of oral habits such as thumb sucking and pacifier use which could be detrimental to the child's oral dentition. After the assessment is completed, an appropriate next appointment would be scheduled based on the individual child's needs.

The establishment of a "Dental Home" is extremely important to lay the foundation for positive dental experiences in the future. A child will develop a comfort level with the dental office by being introduced at a young age. By having experiences that are preventive instead of urgent, the lifelong relationship with routine care will remain a positive experience. The connection between dental health and overall general health is well documented. Dental disease is a reality. It is painful and costly. Early prevention and intervention is the key to healthy smiles for life!

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