

## Child Dental Care

# Protecting Your Child's Healthy Smile

(NAPSA)—Sure, they start out all shiny and healthy, but how do you keep your child's teeth staying that way?

The answer is important since not only can dental problems be costly to fix, they can also—left unchecked—have adverse health consequences later in life. Studies have linked poor oral health to everything from an increased risk of heart attack and stroke to difficulty controlling blood sugar among diabetics.

“There really is no ‘cure’ in the sense that once you have a dental problem like a cavity, you can only slow the progression,” says Dr. David Guarrera, doctor of dental surgery. “That’s why helping children practice good oral health habits is crucial.”

So what’s a concerned parent to do? Read on for some tips from the experts:

- **Avoid the dreaded “Baby Bottle Tooth Decay.”** It’s caused by prolonged contact with almost any liquid other than plain water. (The technical term, as the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research reminds us, is “early childhood caries.”) So jot these three no-nos down: Don’t routinely put your children to bed with a bottle containing sweetened liquids; don’t use bottles as pacifiers; and don’t even think about dipping pacifiers in sweetened liquids, honey or sugar.

- **A different way to mark that first birthday.** A party with clowns and lots of presents may be the traditional route, but both the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry and the American Dental Association recommend that a child’s first visit to the dentist



**Experts say this child’s and others’ first visit to the dentist should have been before age 1.**

occur no later than the child’s first birthday.

- **To wipe or not to wipe.** Yes, getting your infant to eat pureed carrots can be a chore by itself, but did you know you’re also supposed to wipe the infant’s gums and teeth after each feeding with either a clean, moist cloth or a baby toothbrush?

- **It takes two.** To floss, that is. And as soon as kids have two teeth that touch, parents should help them clean between them daily with floss or an interdental cleaner.

To help get your kids involved in their own oral health care—something widely urged—you should also check out a free online Oral Health Library ([www.metlife.com/dental](http://www.metlife.com/dental)) that includes an interactive parent-child game, risk assessment tools and a trove of consumer-friendly information from top experts. The site is courtesy of MetLife, a leading provider of dental plan administration serving nearly 20 million people, and most of its content is available in both English and Spanish.

Adults can find answers to their own questions, too—including whether losing teeth is a natural part of aging. (Answer: It most definitely isn’t.)