

What can you do to protect your child's TEETH?

Teaching a child to take care of their teeth is often an uphill battle. But if you've ever had a child with toothache, needing fillings or even extractions, it's enough to make you realize how important dental hygiene is.

Child Magazine visited Shams Moopen Dental Practice in Kingsley and asked practice manager Naseer Askari what we, as parents should be doing to take care of our children's teeth.



Take your child to the dentist

"The most important thing is that parents must take their child to the dentist every six months," said Naseer. "Dental problems do not just appear overnight – a cavity takes 3-6 months to develop. Don't wait until your child has a toothache – that is when the problem has reached crisis point."

Be aware of your child's teeth

"At least once a week a parent should brush their child's teeth and take a good look at the teeth. Look at each tooth individually and check it for any changes," said Naseer. "Also monitor their dietary habits – so if your child stops eating ice cream

suddenly – this could be because it hurts. Also a child might start using one side of the jaw - this could mean they have pain on the other side. Monitor it."

"Children are often even more scared of dentist than adults," he added. "They may not tell, because they don't want to go to the dentist."

Sweets, sugary foods & drinks

It's common knowledge that sweets and sugary foods are bad for the teeth. Cutting them out completely is the ideal, but in reality it's not as easy as it sounds. So what can we do to reduce the risks without

completely removing all sugars from the diet?

"Have a time in the day, or a day in the week when you allow your children to eat and drink all their sweets, chocolate and fizzy drinks," advised Naseer.

"Every time you eat a sweet the acidity in your mouth changes and that lasts about 30-35 minutes. During that time the sugars are causing damage to your teeth. If you have a packet of 10 sweets and you eat them all at once, the damaging effects will last for around 30-35 minutes after. If you eat one every half an hour, the damage will occur for the whole time."

And Naseer added that the worst time to eat sweets or have a sugary drink is last thing at night before going to sleep.

"Whatever you have before going to sleep stays on your teeth for the whole night. "As the mouth is not constantly producing saliva when you are asleep it means anything just sits there, doing damage."

Look for hidden sugars

Not every food with sugar to damage the teeth is sweet, says Naseer.

"Check the labels and look for hidden sugars," he says. "Something like crisps or chips may not look like sugary food but they are made of potato and anything carbohydrate is, in fact, a sugar."

Don't give toddlers bottles for the night

"It is very bad for the teeth if you give your toddler a bottle of milk to sleep with," said Naseer. "This is children over the age of one year, and when the child wakes up the bottle goes back in the mouth. It's very bad for the teeth."

Brushing

"Duration is very important and children should brush for three minutes each time. They should brush after breakfast and before bed. The toothpaste is not so important but the toothbrush should have a very small head. Children should never use an adult toothbrush."

"Children get bored with brushing their teeth but you can make it more interesting for them by varying it," said Naseer. "Change toothpastes, have different toothbrushes for different days, have a stopwatch to time the brushing, or time them brushing each individual tooth. Ten seconds on every tooth, and they must also be aware that each tooth has at least two surfaces."

Baby teeth ARE important

"Many parents believe that their child's baby teeth are not so important because they will be replaced with their adult teeth. This is not true. The way the mouth and teeth develop, there is a natural progression from baby teeth to adult teeth. If a child loses a baby tooth, all of the other teeth will move to close the space, and this alters the naturally harmony in the mouth. This can then cause problems, as the adult tooth may then not have its correct space in the mouth to come down to," explained Naseer.

"It is important to try and save a baby tooth unless it is nearly time for it to fall out."

Thumb Sucking

"Parents should try and break the habit of thumb sucking in children over the age 3," said Naseer.

"Otherwise it can cause their teeth to stick out.

"It can be very difficult to break any habit and this is no exception," he added. "Parents must tackle it gently by talking to the child and explaining why they must try and stop sucking their thumb. It is something that will take time and perseverance."