

How Do I Take Care Of My Children's Teeth?

A Parent's Guide for Healthy Children's
Teeth from Birth through Adolescence



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Introduction

Oral health is an important part of the general health of your child. We hear a lot about the importance of nutrition, but little is mentioned about the fact that your child's mouth is one of the key points that allow them to have the best nutrition.

As we all know, some diseases in the body take many years to start showing signs and symptoms, while some diseases happen very fast. The same goes for the mouth. For the diseases that take a long time to start showing, the best way to prevent them and their problems that can be painful and expensive is to start building the right habits early on in your child's life.

When there is a need for treatment, a dentist should be contacted, and his advice followed, and an understanding of the nature of the treatment is important as it will help us maintain and take care of the treatment and hopefully prevent further need for treatment.

Why would a child need dental treatment? There are many different reasons we treat children of all ages. It could be to restore function after an injury or to stop a dental cavity, cosmetic fixes, assessment of the development of the dentition and teeth eruption, or the direst of appointments: stop the pain!

As we all know, the real secret is to *prevent* dental decay and dental disease. In our combined 70 years of dentistry, we have noticed that many of the oral diseases we treat could have been prevented with the right knowledge and by practicing the right habits.

After reading this book, our hope for you is you'll understand how simple it is to prevent many of the common oral diseases and that we will have answered all your questions about dental cavities and oral health in general.

We hope you will be inspired to take the necessary steps to protect your child's health now and for years into their future. Teaching them the right knowledge and implanting in them the right oral hygiene habits could be one of the best gifts you can give them.

Whenever the need arises to visit us, you have our promise we will do everything in our power to give your child that happy smile you love so much!

To the parents of Happy and Healthy Kids,
*Karim ElMofty, Bob Vavaroutsos &
Kal Khaled*

Chapter One

My Baby's Teeth Are Turning Brown

Let's start talking about the contents of the book and what you'll learn. Let's go to the subtitle again: *The Parent's Guide to Healthy Kids' Teeth*. We're not only talking about cavities; we are talking about overall oral health. The whole idea that we had in mind when starting this book was to talk about the different issues that could encounter children (and parents, of course), taking care of them in a chronological sequence

Let's start by talking about why a baby's teeth might be turning brown. There are a lot of different colors that we're going to mention throughout this book. What is happening if the baby's teeth are brown?

We're all expecting the baby teeth to erupt in their place, white and shiny and good looking, exactly as we see in pictures of beautiful children everywhere. Unfortunately, sometimes we see a mother bringing in her baby, maybe

one or one and a half years old, a small baby. Mom's saying the teeth are brown, destroyed, and that the teeth erupted that way.

There are some conditions, of course, that could lead to the teeth erupting in brown color or being deformed in one way or another. However, the reason is usually early childhood caries.

Early childhood caries (ECC) are not developmental defects. They're cavities, but we see them in a child younger than six and usually following a pattern that is different than the usual hole in the tooth that we are used to seeing in older children and adults. Early Childhood Caries (ECC) makes the anterior teeth, the first primary teeth to erupt, turn brown and, if left untreated, could extend to all primary teeth. Often, this is when we see the baby's teeth are brown or turning brown and starting to chip.

What Are Early Childhood Caries (ECC)?

ECC is a form of dental decay. It's not very different from regular dental decay that you see

in older children and adults. The main difference is the pattern in which this happens. It's not like a small dark hole in the tooth as we are used to seeing; it rapidly progresses to be a change of colour and texture of an entire tooth surface, followed by its destruction. The development of a cavity will usually happen in the area where the food remains were left on the tooth surface.

Dental decay (normal cavities or ECC) happens when food remains on the teeth after a meal in the normal presence of bacteria. The bacteria start eating the food that remains. As a living beings, after eating, these bacteria begin to excrete something, an acid. The acid starts to react with nearby tooth surfaces making them weaker and eventually destroying the layers of the surface of the teeth. This happens on a microscopic level, but with repetition, it ends up causing a visually detectable cavity.

Returning to the young nursing baby with teeth turning brown, usually, the reason for ECC is some milk, maybe, or remnants of food or sugary liquid (juice) on the surface of teeth. The cavities that we see are all over the surface of

the teeth, especially the anterior ones, where remnants of milk would stay for the longest time after nursing.

A General Idea About How a Cavity Can Be Treated

It is important to know 2 points before talking about the treatment of a cavity,

- 1- Every patient is different; every cavity is different. The final decision and treatment recommendation must be made by a dentist.
- 2- A cavity is not the disease; the disease is the destruction of the tooth caused by bacteria. Stopping the disease by controlling the bacteria and food remains is important, then we discuss how to restore the cavity/save the tooth.

When thinking about filling a cavity/ saving a tooth, the proper treatment depends, of course, on the cavity size. The treatment requires removing part of the diseased tooth and restoring the removed part with an appropriate

filling and/or covering it to make it strong and white again. Of course, as much as we can make treatments easy and comfortable nowadays but it can remain a psychological burden on the parents who had a nice, cute, healthy smile on their baby who now needs to go and have some dental treatment and maybe anesthesia or some sedation to have the treatment done. It's a process that usually has a favorable outcome, but it remains a process that all parties would prefer to avoid; hence we wrote this book, and we support Oral Health promotion activities in our community.

Three Common Misunderstandings or Myths about Cavities in Children

The first myth that we usually hear is about milk. *Since milk is essential for the newborn's health, then it should be great for the teeth, so it is impossible that milk can cause dental cavities.*

Regarding milk, there is still controversy over how severe its effect is on causing dental cavities. As for its importance for a newborn, always follow your pediatrician's advice.

Within the scope of this book, oral health, we recommend dealing with milk like any other type of food; simply clean the teeth after drinking milk.

Another myth is that a tooth that was filled is stronger and maybe even immune to new cavities. This is wrong.

When a tooth gets a cavity, and we want to restore it, we clean the cavity, we clean the decayed tooth, and then we put the filling in. The tooth is not stronger. The tooth has a partial prosthetic replacement now (the filling). Part of the tooth is replaced with artificial material. The weakest point will always remain the margin between the filling material and the tooth.

We like to explain this part usually with the example of stickers that we use everywhere. It doesn't matter how strong the glue of the sticker is. If you want to remove a sticker, you will start from the edges, and piece by piece, little by little, you peel it away. Dental decay can happen again below the filling, and then we lose the filling, even for a tooth that's had a filling perfectly done, and everything was good for a long time.

If the same habits that led to the cavity in the first place continue to be practiced, the tooth will probably have another cavity and may lose the filling, or maybe it will get a more advanced cavity.

A third common myth is regarding the importance of treating primary teeth. When parents come in with their children complaining of painful primary teeth, and then we discover there are cavities in the primary teeth. Then, the question that we usually get is, *“Those are milk teeth, primary teeth. They’re going to fall out anyway. Why do we treat them?”*

This is an important question because, of course, they are only milk teeth, but we always recommend treating them because they serve very important functions such as talking, eating, chewing and maintaining the space for the permanent tooth that will follow them. Of course, they’re helping the child eat and chew food, and they’re helping with normal, good nutrition.

It’s very important to have good-looking teeth, not leave them decayed, for proper psychological development in the future. One of

the very important functions that primary teeth serve is maintaining the space in the jaw for the permanent teeth to erupt when they're ready. If we leave the teeth to decay, this could lead to infections and other problems. If we rush into removing the teeth without planning it right, we can lose spaces that may be needed in the future, or we may end up with malalignment of the teeth and the need for braces or things like that.

The Risk of Believing in Myths

It's a very dark area that we'll discuss now. But unfortunately, if we leave cavities untreated, with the dietary and hygiene habits that caused them in the first place unchanged, chances are that those cavities will continue progressing. When a cavity gets bigger, it can reach the pulp of the tooth; when it reaches the pulp of the tooth, bacteria enter a place they are not meant to enter and cause an infection.

The infection of the pulp could lead to an abscess and swelling. Children can end up in hospitals because of a big dental infection resulting from a tooth cavity.

This story that explains the progress of a cavity that leads to a large swelling is scary. However, not every cavity will end up continuing this path. Also, not all cavities would progress at the same speed.

The other issue with filled teeth, in children especially, is that people have the sense that, “I have an immune tooth now because it has a filling,” and they go back to all the bad habits that lead to decay. It’s very common for us to see the cavities starting again at the filling margin, as we were telling you in the sticker example. This cavity would go deeper, removing the filling from its place. Once the filling is gone, the cavity starts to progress again. Then we may head toward infection and everything else we discussed.

Losing a tooth too early may lead to space disturbance in the developing jaw. The space that was guarded by the primary tooth is gone because teeth, in most cases, tend to drift to close any space in between them, eventually.

Therefore, when space is closed, and the permanent tooth is ready to erupt at the proper time, it won't erupt because it can't find a space. Sometimes it remains impacted, which could require surgery in the future. The tooth can erupt but in the wrong way or in a different direction.

Chapter Two

My Child Won't Brush Their Teeth

“How do cavities happen, and how do I prevent them?” This is our favorite part of our job. To spread awareness and to explain and reexplain in different ways every day. In a very simple way, what are cavities? We have these ideas in our minds that a cavity is a hole in a tooth. It's a black thing. It's a dark thing, but let's start from the beginning. What is a cavity?

When we leave any food outside in warm weather, it goes bad. That is very simple. What happens when food goes bad? It becomes bitter and sour. How did it go bad? Bacteria started eating it, and as living creatures, when they eat, they have to excrete something. Bacteria excrete acid.

Bacteria are microscopic creatures that live on every surface around us. Not all of them are harmful. They're creatures living there like insects, like animals, but they're microscopic. We don't see them.

Bacteria find a source of nutrition, which is our food. They start eating the food, digest it and excrete acids. This is very normal. These same acids in different bacteria can give us yogurt and sourdough bread. Many industries depend on this “fermentation process”. However, there’s good fermentation that gives us yogurt, and then there’s bad fermentation that gives us dental decay and other diseases.

If you have ever eaten anything that’s gone bad by mistake, you notice that it’s sour. This is because it’s turning into acid. Usually, when an acid comes in contact with any other material or surface, it reacts with it. How aggressive the reaction depends on the acid, the material, and other factors.

How is this related to a cavity? When we eat something delicious and then we don’t brush our teeth afterward, the food remains on the surfaces of the teeth and in between them. We’re talking about a million particles of microscopic size. That’s small. The food remains on the surface of our teeth, in between our teeth, and stays there.

We have bacteria in our mouths that start eating this food and turning it into acids. The acid right next to the tooth will attack the tooth surface on a microscopic level, causing a weak area or microcavity. It will start to create those microscopic cavities on the tooth that we can't see with our eyes. The first change that we can detect with our eyes is going to be a white patch on the tooth. We call it the chalky white spot. This first sign of a cavity is a visual effect of millions of small cavities next to each other, changing the way light reflects on the tooth. It could be imagined as the difference between a clear polished clean window and a window roughened with sandpaper.

How Cavities Form

This white patch is formed of millions of microscopic cavities right next to each other. This process, of course, doesn't happen overnight. It happens with the repeated acid formation that gets in contact with the tooth surface and reacts with it. The more the acid attack continues to happen, the more the surface will get "dissolved, and those cavities will form

and become bigger”. Eventually, they will join together to form one big cavity that we will eventually see and recognize as a cavity in the future.

It’s a long story with many details, but it shows us that cavities result from the decaying of the food that we leave in our mouth without cleaning, brushing, flossing, or removing it from a place where it shouldn’t be. This is how a cavity happens.

The main fuel for the cavity is the food remains, NOT the teeth. Bacteria do not eat the teeth; they eat food remains, and the byproducts of their digestion dissolve the teeth forming cavities.

How to Prevent Them

Let’s look at the different causes that, working together, lead to the formation of this cavity and control them one by one. We have food remnants, we have bacteria, and we have the teeth, the time, and the moist warm environment where the acid attack is happening. Normal teeth are smooth and designed in a way

that doesn't encourage food to be trapped; any deviation from this normal should be fixed. However, this is not a major factor and is assessed on an individual basis at the dentist's office.

So the variables under our control at home are the food and the bacteria and the time we allow them to stay together. Can we get rid of the bacteria in our mouths completely? NO, we can't; we can't sterilize our mouths. In fact, any mouthwash or chemical that is antibacterial will reduce the number of bacteria, and they will reproduce, and their numbers will increase again eventually.

What we can control very well is the food that remains on our teeth. This is the food that the bacteria will eat and produce acid that will create cavities. In fact, we can get rid of the food that remains on our teeth mechanically using a toothbrush, dental floss, and most manual and automatic oral hygiene tools. The easiest habit we can do is brush our teeth. Make sure that no food or "plaque" is left on the surface of the teeth; nothing is left in between the teeth. This is very important. This is the

core of all oral health advice out there that you have ever heard before. It targets this preventative measure.

Preventing Cavities

A toothbrush will remove the food mechanically. You're sweeping it out. Mouthwash will make everything clean with the rinsing motion, and the chemicals in it could kill some bacteria and reduce their number, yes! But you still have to remove the food remains mechanically with a toothbrush before using any complementary method.

Flossing between your teeth is the most common and most effective way to clean those surfaces between the teeth. The toothbrush will not reach there, no matter how good a brusher you are. If two teeth are in contact, the toothbrush will not clean between them, but floss or interdental brushes will. Your dentist or dental hygienist will recommend which one is best for you.

Tips to Help Your Child Brush

This is not a book about parenting or about psychology. However, in our opinion, the most efficient ways to motivate a child to adopt a good habit come from both fields. KnowDental, a company that specializes in oral health promotion through the gamification of oral health knowledge and advice, uses conditioning, modelling, and positive associations to internally motivate your child.

External motivation is not bad. “If you brush your teeth well for a week, I will buy you the toy you wanted.” Sometimes it works. However, from our experience, internal motivation is more efficient, more sustainable and helps build strong habits. We see internal motivation working better in the long term because you’re giving the child the right mindset and the right reason to be practicing the right habit.

It is important to keep in mind that every child is different, and what works with one child could need modification to work with another.

Everything we discuss in this chapter are suggestions, and you are the best judge of what will work and how to apply it to your child.

Using words of praise, you want to associate tooth brushing with responsible and clean behaviour. When the child does that, he is good. He is smart. Everyone who has children or has worked with children knows that children like to be praised by their parents, their role models. Whenever they brush, whenever they do the right thing with regard to their oral hygiene, they have to be praised.

When talking about brushing with children, try to avoid mentioning it as an order. It is better to talk about why it is important. Instead of asking, “Did you brush your teeth?” Ask them if they cleaned their teeth from what they just ate.

We also know from experience that children, in most cases, will respond more to their parents' example than their orders or advice. You have to start with yourself. If you want your child to brush their teeth every day, you must brush your teeth every day first. It can be very hard for you as a parent if you don't have good

habits to then tell your child to do it and keep pushing them to do it. We haven't seen this succeed very often.

Honestly, one of the best gifts you can give to your child is good oral hygiene habits, the right ones. It will save them a lot of effort, time, and money in the future. We must not forget that an ounce of prevention is indeed worth a pound of cure.

Now let's talk about practical advice that directly affects oral health and could prevent cavities. Start by focusing on the food that you eat frequently. What are you eating? Are you snacking on vegetables, fruits, and nuts? Are you snacking on Goldfish and candies? You have to be mindful of what you're snacking on because of two reasons:

- 1- The time food spends in your mouth, being chewed and prepared to swallow, is more important than the quantity you eat of such food. (From an oral health perspective. The quantity is important, of course, but from a nutrition perspective)

- 2- While anything we eat that provides us with nutrition and energy has the ability to cause cavities and gum inflammation, some types of food are faster than others.

Think about when you eat highly cariogenic food. Highly cariogenic food, like sweets, is usually made up of sticky simple carbohydrates. When are you eating this food? Are you eating it right before you go to bed? So bacteria have the entire night to digest it and produce acids that destroy your teeth? Or Are you eating it in the morning before brushing, and then you brush right away? And so the food and the bacteria spend minimal time on your teeth and gums?

The frequency of eating something that may cause a cavity and the length of time it remains in your mouth are more important than the quantity (from an oral health perspective). If you're eating toffee or some sticky chocolate, it's worse for your teeth than if you're drinking juice, for example. Of course, you're not sipping on juice all day.

To conclude, brush your teeth twice every day. It's the core oral hygiene advice. Brush one time after breakfast in the morning and one time before going to bed and flossing. And then be mindful of your nutrition, what and when you eat. (it is best to follow a nutrition guideline by a trustworthy scientific institute. Also, keep in mind every complementary oral hygiene tool.

What Age Is the Best Age to Brush

It's best to start brushing at the very beginning, as soon as the child is born. The comment we usually get after this suggestion is, "But they don't have any teeth yet." True, they don't have any teeth yet, but they have cheeks, and they have gums. They have an oral cavity that is used to eat or drink. Any food that stays there could start the fermentation process.

Start the habit of getting a damp piece of cloth and wiping the gums and inside of the cheeks after every meal. You should start to develop this habit for yourself as the caregiver. From an early age, the child gets used to the action without even talking about it. "After we eat, we

have to clean our mouths.” It’s a very good habit to start very early on.

When the teeth appear, we want to start using the toothbrush. You don’t want to use any toothpaste, just a drop of water. Of course, when we say “drop of water” or “damp”, we have to make sure that the child doesn’t drink water until the pediatrician allows you to do so. It’s not that we’re giving the baby water to drink; it’s just something damp to clean the inside of the mouth with.

The goal of using a toothbrush right without toothpaste after the teeth erupt is to remove the white material (plaque) from the surface of the teeth.

As more teeth come out, the more we adjust our oral habits. Then at some point, those teeth are going to come in contact together. As soon as we see two teeth coming in contact with each other, we have to start using dental floss as it is the simplest oral hygiene tool that cleans between the teeth.

Many different oral hygiene products exist. You must start exploring them very early on in the life of your child, and every age has its specific advice. The goal is to be using products that allow you to clean all surfaces of the teeth and not to give your child a hard time doing it.

Chapter Three

What Are Milk Teeth?

Milk teeth are the first set of teeth that we get at the beginning of our lives. They are what we think of as the first teeth. They stay in our mouths for a certain period of time, and then we lose them so the permanent teeth can come in. There are a lot of differences between milk teeth and permanent teeth. The sizes of the teeth are different. The structure is different, as are the shape and the colour.

The milk teeth have a lot of functions. They start forming before the child is born. This is why important nutrition advice is given to pregnant women because, along with every important thing in the child's body, we want to provide the teeth with everything they need to develop properly.

During the first stages of development, when the teeth form in a baby's mouth, the mother will need the proper nutrition needed for tooth development. When the child is born, the teeth

and roots are still forming. When most of the roots are formed, we start seeing the tooth's eruption in the mouth. Before that, the tooth is hidden inside the gums. Tooth formation is a continuous process. It doesn't appear overnight.

The eruption time is another question. When will a baby get their first teeth? When will they get their second tooth? When will they lose teeth? We have eruption times and tables in the books; the time there is always an average. When a book says a certain tooth will erupt at six months or six years, it means around this time, not necessarily on the day the child turns six months or six years.

It's very important for us that the teeth's eruption sequence is normal, more so than when exactly the teeth come in. It's one of those things that differ between children. Not all children walk at the same time, and this is neither good nor bad. Not all children talk at the same time, and it's neither good nor bad. It's simply individual differences.

Stories about Cavities in Milk Teeth from Our Side

Every dentist who works with children has seen a child who may be even younger than two years of age that needed to have one or more of his milk teeth extracted. Sometimes restoring the teeth can be done, but sometimes extracting them is the only treatment, and it is usually the least favorite treatment to do.

Of course, by extracting these teeth, we save the child from potential complications, but we know that the prevention of cavities is so simple. We wish we could have told a parent that before the problem happened and before it reached a point where a tooth had to be removed. Any story of this kind, of course, is tragic. All dentists have seen that.

When we talk to new parents, who are struggling with sleep, eating, and finding time for themselves, we mention to them that they have to wipe their baby's teeth after they eat. They start trying to do it, and the baby cries. They'll say, "But this is the only time when they sleep. They eat, and then they sleep. Do you want me to wake them up to brush their teeth?"

This is a very common question. We look down as if we said something wrong, but we didn't say anything wrong. We gave the right advice, but unfortunately, we increased the burden and added one more thing to do to a mother who is trying to do everything good for her child at the same time.

The paradox is most good habits are usually not easy to start, and they are not easy at the beginning. However, once you start the good habits, they become part of your everyday routine that you do without thinking or without a single doubt. Implanting the right oral hygiene habits in your child is one of the best gifts you can give them.

So, how can you clean a baby's mouth after they eat and while they are sleeping? This is hard for new parents, including dentists who are new parents. In the beginning, the child is going to wake up when you try to clean their teeth. He is going to cry, and he's going to give you a hard time. The second time, it is not going to be as bad. The third time is not going to be as bad. We have seen children who are so used to having their teeth cleaned once they finish eating that if they are sleeping, they don't even

wake up. They're not thinking about it. They eat, and then they sleep. The mother is wiping their teeth, wiping their cheek from inside, and they don't wake up, so it works. It's hard at the beginning, but it's the best way to prevent cavities.

We always wish the best of luck to every new mom out there. She is suddenly faced with a challenge that stretches her abilities to the maximum, and she is trying to do her best.

Chapter Four

My Child Lost Their First Tooth

What is important to know or do when your child starts losing their baby teeth? It is important to know that this is a perfectly normal process. Also Congratulations! You have a healthy child who is growing and developing normally, you are doing a great job, and your child has reached an important landmark. All cultures have different fun activities related to changing teeth; the tooth fairy is the most common one that we have heard.

Losing the first tooth means that the child is entering the phase that we call mixed dentition, where he will start losing their milk teeth and will get their permanent teeth. Usually, this happens between six and 12 years old. Remember the averages that we mentioned earlier? It's important to keep the mouth and teeth very clean around this stage, and this is why.

While teeth are losing their attachment in preparation to fall out, new small areas appear for food impaction in the space where the tooth is moving or even below what remains of the tooth.

Since there are new spaces for food to be impacted and remnants of food to stay, the same process that leads to cavities forming can happen, which is the food going bad, the bacteria in the mouth producing acids, and the acids forming the cavities. When these acids are in contact with the gums, the gums get inflamed. If the child is not taking care of his oral hygiene with the proper methods, this is when you see a lot of gum inflammation.

The first thing that comes to mind when talking about prevention is keeping the teeth extra clean. At this time, you should also be visiting your dentist regularly to make sure that everything is in order.

We want the first dental visit to be done in the first year of the child's life, with or even before the first tooth's appearance. After this visit, follow-up and dental hygiene visits are scheduled. At six or seven years, your child's

regular dental hygiene appointments are being made so that the dentist will keep an eye on their oral health, making sure everything is within normal limits

What Are Those Spaces Between the Teeth?

One of the first things that draws our attention to the mouth is the smile. When children smile, it's very common to see spaces between the teeth. This is considered normal and is liable to change several times during the growth and development of the jaws and teeth.

To show you how the development of the jaws and teeth is such a complicated and dynamic process, we're going to mention randomly the changes that happen during that time.

Every primary tooth, with the exception of a few, is generally smaller than the permanent teeth that will follow. When a primary tooth falls out, this space is supposed to be filled with a larger tooth. How would this happen? This space needed is usually made available when the jaw grows in size as the child is growing. The natural spaces that appear between the

primary teeth compensate for that. It's a very, very dynamic phase. There are so many variables that people study all their lives to understand how it happens. Spaces appear, spaces disappear, and the positions of the teeth change. It's fascinating to see it happening.

Seeing some spaces is usually very normal. However, please do not consider this advice as a diagnosis. You should be following up with your dentist because, of course, some spaces could be a deviation from normal that should be addressed by the dentist, but generally speaking, small spaces between the teeth are very normal.

Sometimes the problem with the spaces between the teeth is not in their abundance but in their scarcity. When there's not enough space between the teeth, the growth of the jaws doesn't happen as fast as expected.

Everyone who treats children has seen this before. When you look at the lower teeth, the lower anterior primary teeth, you get the lower permanent teeth erupting behind them toward the tongue; this is very common. We see a lot of patients who are asking if this is normal?"

Usually, yes. Because the space in this lower anterior area did not grow as fast as the permanent teeth erupt, there is no space for these permanent teeth to take the exact place of the primary teeth falling out. Therefore, they erupt towards the tongue to the back, and then slowly, as the jaw grows, as space grows bigger, they take their space in the front. This is an example of how dynamic this stage of development is and how seemingly strange things can be normal.

Our Encouragement to You

Following up with your dentist is one of the most important things you can do as a parent because so many variables are happening at this time. You want to make sure that everything is taking its normal place, happening in the normal sequence. We don't want to have the odd problem and not be aware of it. We don't want to try to treat it later on with a sophisticated treatment when its original treatment would have been very easy, especially with the spaces and the change in teeth. Keep your child's teeth

very clean because, once the permanent teeth erupt, this is their most vulnerable time.

They're more liable to decay as soon as they erupt, and remember, as we discussed earlier, this is the time when more areas of food impaction are formed in the mouth around and under the moving teeth. It's a very risky time. We need to be doing the follow-up with the dentist, keeping the teeth clean while celebrating the loss of every tooth.

Chapter Five

Protecting Adolescent Teeth

What happens when children lose their baby teeth? What do hormones have to do with a child's teeth when he is becoming an adult?

It's an interesting time. Children are changing. They're starting to become the adult version of themselves. What used to work with them in terms of parenting is changing now. If you used to motivate them to do the right thing in a certain way, you might need to revisit your methods. We're talking about oral hygiene and usually everything else in life

Now, talking about oral hygiene and taking care of the teeth, this is when the teeth are still changing. Be sure that they're doing the right thing by taking care of their teeth properly.

Hormones

The added complication at this age is hormones. The sex hormones that are starting at this point, with puberty, will cause some changes in the gums. What is this change? The hormones don't directly affect the gums. They make the inflammation of the gums, if it happens, more pronounced.

To simplify this as much as possible, imagine, for example, you had the bad habit of not brushing your teeth for a couple of days in a row when you were a child, and nothing happened to your gums. Now that you're an adolescent, you have adult hormones in the body, and you are experiencing all of these changes. If you go the same two days without brushing your teeth, you may start to notice that your gums are getting bigger, getting inflamed. The smell of your breath is changing fast. Maybe bleeding will start from the gums until you brush, but everything will go back to normal. The presence of hormones at this age makes gum inflammation more pronounced. It's likely to happen in most cases.

Protecting Your Teen's Teeth

This is the time when we see why internal motivation is usually superior. External motivation is very nice, but it usually works better with younger children. Of course, the “you do this, and I will reward you” approach is easy and very common. However, when adolescents start questioning everything, external motivation starts to lose its effect. When the child has been internally motivated early on and given the right reasons behind every behavior, the good habits are less likely to disappear.

This is a personal opinion, of course, and we're not parenting experts, but this is how we see most of our cases. This is what we see dealing with this age group in our practice.

Contact Sports and Adolescent Teeth

This is an important topic because children love to play. They love to do different kinds of sports. Sometimes, they're a little bit aggressive, sometimes not in a peaceful way. It's very common for kids to get hurt during

sports or even when playing during break time at school. One of the main areas of the body that might get hit is the face. As dentists, we deal with various kinds of facial trauma: teeth fractures, facial bone fractures, cuts, and wounds from such accidents. Sports dentistry is the way of using dentistry to prevent oral, facial, and dental injuries from contact sports.

There are two aspects. There is the prevention and treatment of the damage. Dental preventive measures are usually different kinds of mouthguards. Dentists play a big role in spreading awareness on how to use those mouthguards. A properly fitted mouthguard can protect your teen from dental trauma when accidents happen. This is very important to know.

The child will always try to take care of themselves and not get injured, but the problem is they're developing their motor function and the sense of their bodies. They're growing, and accidents happen, so mouthguards are very important.

What is a mouthguard? A mouthguard is a tray for the teeth, like a nightguard. It is a mold of

the teeth that we bite on, made of different materials with various degrees of hardness and flexibility. It's something that we wear to bite on while playing sports. It cushions any hits that we get to our teeth from outside. At the same time, it holds the teeth together while you're biting on the mouthguard. It holds your jaw closed in a safe way.

If your teeth get hit, the power of the blow is distributed to several teeth with a larger area, and the damage is minimized. Your teeth are not getting hit one by one. They're getting the hit while all reinforced together. This is the simple concept behind this. There are so many different kinds of mouthguards. There are cool ones with colours. There are those that you can buy from the drugstore. There are those that you can purchase at the dentist's office. We prefer the fitted one that your dentist makes for you because it will be better than anything else in terms of prevention.

Call 911

If an accident happens, the damage depends on the type of accident. Some accidents need to be

addressed on the spot, of course. In an emergency, call 911 right away.

There's no question about that. Paramedics are better trained to make sure that all the organs of the body are in good condition and that your child is healthy. They also make sure that there's no brain problem or injury, or trauma to the head that requires not moving the child. Once all of these concerns are excluded, and it turns out that this accident is causing a problem with a tooth or something related to the mouth, our involvement as dentists will begin.

What happened to the tooth? Is the tooth broken? Is there a crack on the tooth? Is the tooth loose? Did the tooth go deeper into the bone? Did the tooth fall out, and you're holding the tooth in your hand? What happened exactly?

Was It Intruded, or Was It Extruded? There is so much advice for every one of those accidents. This book is not meant to be a manual of what to do in such a case in detail, but definitely, one of the first things we want you to do is to go directly to your dentist or to an emergency dental office to show them what happened as soon as possible. As a general rule,

for any trauma from an accident, when treated early, the prognosis is better than when treated late.

If a tooth is fractured, try to keep the fractured part and bring it to your dentist. Sometimes we can use the fractured part.

One example of an accident that we need to address as soon as it happens is when a tooth falls out of your mouth. We call it an avulsion. The tooth is avulsed from your mouth. In this case, you want to try to put the tooth back in its place immediately. If it is dirty, rinse it with milk, saline, or the patient's saliva before putting it in place.

If it is impossible to do this, keep the tooth wet in Milk, HBSS, saliva, or saline until you reach the closest dental office, taking care not to touch the root.

Seek help as soon as possible. **DO NOT WAIT!**

Chapter Six

Why Are My Child's Gums Bleeding?

When the patient is complaining of bleeding gums, then we know we are talking about another very common oral disease, Gum disease. Why would the gums bleed if you brush them or if you touch them? What about the common drop of blood that you sometimes have on your gums?

The cause of bleeding gums, trying to simplify for brevity, is a little bit similar to the story of dental decay. Food left outside in warm weather goes bad, and it is transformed into acids by bacteria. When this happens inside your mouth, acids are in continuous contact with the gums. This continuous contact causes the gums to start reacting. They become inflamed. The body feels that there is a chemical attack targeting the gums (the acid). It starts sending a lot of blood to make the gums ready with immunity cells, chemicals, and nutrients to fight the infection. This is how it happens.

Swollen and Inflamed Gums

When the gums are inflamed and swollen, it's like any other swelling in your body. If you got hit on your hand, and it's swollen, it's more liable to pain if you touch it in a way that didn't hurt before. It will hurt now if it is touched. If you get hit again in the same area, it's more likely to start bleeding. This is what happens to the gums. The gums are inflamed because there is an acid attack coming from the food getting digested by bacteria in between the teeth.

When food is left to get eaten and digested by bacteria in between the teeth, some of it is transformed into a white material called plaque. It is the white stuff you find under your fingernail after "scratching" the surface of a front tooth after a few days of not brushing.

If left longer without being removed, this white material gets mineralized. The saliva contains minerals. Those minerals start to deposit in the plaque rendering it solid and transforming it into calculus.

This calculus that sometimes develops below the gum, under the microscope, looks like a coral reef in the sea. It's rough. It's a very random structure with sharp and pointy edges. This is another reason the gums get swollen. Every time you're chewing food, you're touching your gum. You're pressing your gums, tearing them from the inside with this microscopically sharp calculus when present below the gum line.

In some relatively rare conditions, the cause is more dangerous than previously mentioned, so if we exclude those conditions, we can say that those are the most common different reasons for the bleeding gums that we usually see.

If It's Not Stopped Early On

If the gums are inflamed for a day or two or a short period, and then we clean them again. The inflammation will go away, and everything will return to normal. If it's not stopped early on, the gum disease will continue to progress.

If the gums remain inflamed for a long time, they start to change. Rarely in children but more in adults do we see that the gums have receded away from the crown of the tooth, causing the inflammation, or the gums keep increasing in size to cover this area completely. They keep swelling and swelling and getting bigger, and bleeding will continue.

Now you know that the gums are inflamed because of food stuck in your mouth, and you need to brush your teeth. The first time you're going to brush your teeth, your gums are going to bleed more than normal because they're already inflamed. Many patients would say, "I'm not brushing my teeth because whenever I brush them, they bleed." Unfortunately, they are in a vicious cycle now, but one that is easy to break.

Your gums are inflamed because of food that's not removed. You try to remove the food; the gums bleed more. You think that you're hurting yourself when, in fact, you're helping yourself.

The bleeding will happen at first, so this would be a perfect time to go to your dentist or dental hygienist. They will do the cleaning you need. They will be able to judge if the bleeding is normal or not. Any bleeding you're not comfortable with will be happening at the dental office or dental hygiene office.

After the bulk of the food stuck in the teeth is removed, brushing should go back to normal, and the bleeding tendency should go back to normal.

Is It Too Late to Save the Tooth?

For gum disease to destroy the bone in the older population, it usually (apart from some exceptions) takes many years of untreated gum disease.

Children don't have those years with their milk teeth. However, other gum diseases don't require years. When children have severe gum disease, they develop rapidly and are not affected by the amount of plaque and amount of food retained on surfaces, like acute gum disease

What do you do to prevent this bleeding or to fix it? If you feel that your gums bleed whenever you eat or brush your teeth, you have to go to your dentist. Make sure that you're getting your regular dental hygiene appointments and performing regular oral hygiene methods.

Chapter Seven

Hockey and Sports Dentistry

Why is it recommended to go see the dentist before your children start any kind of contact sports? We talked about this when we were talking about contact sports earlier. It's the preventive measure: getting the mouthguard and making sure the child is using it.

You also want to be aware of the need for orthodontic treatment, the need for braces, and the need to adjust the position of the teeth. It could be for many different reasons. Sometimes the teeth are pointing outward. Sometimes the teeth are pointing inward. Sometimes the positions of the teeth have changed. Some of these positions of the teeth make the child more susceptible to experiencing accidents with these teeth, especially those that are pointing outward. You want to visit the dentist. Make sure everything is good with your child's mouth, and talk about the mouthguards mentioned earlier.

When to Have Mouthguards Made

Just a few days or around a week is the time we need to do the exam and make the guard. If the sport puts the child at risk of having an accident, discuss this with the dentist. This includes any contact sports and any team sport that involves any kind of violence. It's needed for sports like basketball, football, etc. Any team sports that could involve any accidents require a dentist's visit before discussing possible protection for the child.

What Types of Injuries Can We Fix at the Office?

First of all, the injury that happens on the field must be addressed properly on the field by calling 911. Make sure there's nothing major happening: no coma, no loss of consciousness, etc. Call the doctor in the area or 911. When the child is cleared to move, and you are dealing with a small injury to the mouth or the teeth, this is when you have to visit your dentist right away.

Are we talking about a broken tooth? Bring the broken parts with you if you can. Are you talking about an avulsed tooth? Try to put it

back in its place immediately or after rinsing it with one of the solutions mentioned in the earlier chapter. If it is impossible to replace it, put it in one of the liquids that we mentioned earlier and bring it to your dentist's office as soon as possible. Are we talking about pain or loose teeth? Anything that's happening to your teeth goes to your dentist before going back home.

We see all kinds of crazy stories out there. There are so many stories because everything happens with children on the field. Some people come with their avulsed tooth, and they keep it inside their mouth so that they keep the tooth wet until they reach the dental office (better to spit in a cup and put the tooth in it). Some people put them in milk. Some people put them in tap water (not right). There are proper recommendations for this. People will do anything to keep and save the tooth instead of losing it. We see strange things with these kinds of injuries.

Prevention is better than cure. To be as safe as possible is a very good thing for yourself, your child, and your family. In general, contact sports are great, but be safe, like with anything else in life.

Chapter Eight

My Child Hates Going to the Dentist

How common is it for kids to hate going to the dentist? Why do you hate something, and why do you like something? It's either from your own experience or from experiences you learn about somewhere else. For example, a child coming to the dental office for the first time finds a smiling dentist who is not hurting him, explaining things, and being friendly and playful. There is no reason to feel uncomfortable at the dental office at all. This child will most probably have a good experience at the dentist.

However, a child with a previous traumatic experience with a dentist or who experienced some pain from treatment might think differently about going to the dental office. Maybe this child had an unpleasant experience in a dental office. This child will not be happy to go to another dental office, and it's going to require a lot of time and patience from this new

dentist to convince him/her to stay in the chair and cooperate. Some of the trust was broken between the child and their dental provider.

Another important point to discuss is when a child who's never been to a dentist comes for his first dental visit, but the parents or the caregiver starts encouraging him/her using the wrong words. They keep talking about how brave he/she should be, how strong they should be, and how they shouldn't fear anything they see at the dental office. What happens is that they are leaving the child to wonder what needs bravery? What needs to not be feared? What needs strength? So while they think that they are helping the child to be comfortable and relaxed, the parents are giving the child all the reasons to worry.

The only practice worse than that is to tell stories about painful previous dental experiences in front of the child. So the child would have a direct image of an unreal bad experience to expect.

What we recommend to do, before coming to see the dentist for the first time is to talk to the child about how good this dentist is and how the parents like him/her. He/she will count the

teeth, make sure they brush well and will tell us before doing anything else.

How often are kids cooperative and how often are they non-cooperative with the dentist? There are many things to consider here. How common is it for kids to like/hate going to the dentist? It depends on the patients and on the culture of the practice. It depends on so many factors – some as simple as a scene of a screaming patient at the dentist in a cartoon movie. There are jokes about someone screaming inside the dentist's room while patients are waiting outside. It's a funny joke, but when it's the first thing you see in your life related to dentistry, it's not funny. When children are afraid of something that is not real, such as the idea that dentistry is scary or painful, it blocks their way to having good oral health or good dentistry provided to them.

Unfortunately, it is common for kids to hate going to the dentist. How common is it for a kid to have actual reasons to be afraid of dentists? Surprisingly, it's not common. It's not very common to find a child who had a traumatic experience with a dentist before. In fact, most of the children we see coming into our office

worried are scared due to someone else's negative stories about dentistry.

Dentistry nowadays is very, very different than it used to be years and decades ago. We are doing painless dentistry. Is it comfortable? No, it's not comfortable. It's not normal to have someone picking stuff from between your teeth and then using noisy machines and spraying water in your mouth. It is not fun, but it's not painful.

If the patient feels any pain while the dentist is working, the dentist is trained to stop whatever he is doing and focus on pain control first.

Unfortunately, you see people still resisting getting treatments done. Barring all the reasons we talked about, some children are simply not open to new experiences. Children are different.

Unfortunately, sometimes this resistance to treatment is a problem that prevents us, the dentists, from providing the good treatment that the child needs. There are ways around that.

Sedation Dentistry

It depends on the child's age and degree of awareness and the reason he's cooperative or not cooperative, but there are ways of helping a child go through dental treatment that he/she is resisting while fully awake.

So many factors must be considered to determine the best way to deal with a resistant child; it ranges from dealing with a child in a slow, loving way, full of explanations that please them and encourages them to cooperate, to using some voice control, to what we like to call, "tell, show, do." You tell the child what you're going to do. You show him what you're going to do, and then you do what you need to do for treatment. There are many ways of dealing with a child while he or she's awake.

Then, there are different ways of using sedation, from very simple sedation and using what is commercially known as laughing gas (nitrous oxide) to using general anesthesia and putting the child completely to sleep. There are many reasons and different variables that will help with this decision. Sedation is a good option.

It's not the first solution that we want to resort to, but when there is no other way, it's a safe and effective option, and we are glad we can do it if it helps us provide the treatment needed.

Is Sedation Safe?

Sedation is safe. Millions of people go through surgeries, go through general anesthesia, and go through different kinds of sedation every day in the world. Of course, we hear about the odd accidents that happen every now and then. But generally speaking, it is safe.

Of course, the dental office/hospital has to be prepared to provide such service, and the staff must be trained. Informed consent must be given clearly to the patient/parents, explanations of the procedure done, and all questions must be answered. Every province, every area has its own regulatory body that regulates the provision of this service in a very strict way. Sedation is safe. It's not the first thing we want to do, but we're glad it's there when we need it.

The patient drinks a juice that has a certain drug in it or breaths a gas that will make them a little bit light-headed. The degree of sedation is

determined before starting. Do we want the child light-headed, or do we need them to be fully asleep? This question is for the dentist to answer. Whatever the type of sedation, it will be in the best interest of the patient and will allow the dentist to provide the best treatment possible.

There is a risk to sedation, just as there is a risk of doing anything in life. There is a risk in driving your car to work every day. It's a medical intervention that we always have to make sure that its benefits outweigh its risks.

What Treatments Can Be Done Under Sedation?

Every treatment that we want to do can be done while the patient is under sedation. Maybe the child requires the extraction of a tooth. Maybe a child requires a filling of a tooth. Maybe a child requires treatment of the nerve of the tooth. Many dental treatments can be done while under sedation, even preventive steps and treatments.

Our Encouragement to Parents

The preparation for the first visit to the dentist is very important. Please do not tell your children any bad stories, even while joking. Even if you had a bad experience with the dentist, the chances are that your child will not have a bad experience. If it happens, it's the odd situation. Please don't tell these stories as jokes, either. Our children use every word we say to imagine their life and to create their reality. Talk positively about this experience. Associate it with something positive, like the child is growing up, or going to the dentist is like visiting grandparents or going to a play area, something familiar.

Some dental offices will even ask you about the child's nickname or favorite sports. Some dental offices have decorations made to make children feel comfortable. We try to do everything we can to remove the idea that the dentist is scary. Any poor associations with dentistry shouldn't even be in the child's mind while going to the dentist. This is very important to try to avoid any need for sedation.

Modelling is great. We sometimes ask the parents to get on the chair at the office and open their mouths. When the child sees his mother or father or the caregiver doing what he's required to do, he feels good about doing it, that it's safe, and nothing bad is going to happen. There are many ways of preparing the child for the first dental visit.

When cooperation is not happening, unfortunately, it's too late to rely on modelling. If there is any reason for the child to be uncooperative, this is when we would start talking about sedation. In this case, be comfortable asking every question you have for your dentist or your service provider. Be comfortable saying that you're worried because we have the answers that should make you feel comfortable.

Try to make it an easy experience for the child. Even if you are still worried, don't show your child that you are worried. Try to reassure him until you are reassured. For many dentists and many dental anesthesiologists, and many dental centers worldwide, this is routine work.

In our offices, we see three to four patients every day that require this service. Everything in the office is designed to provide your child with the best service, so when someone needs sedation, we are able to provide it.

Chapter Nine

Taking Care of Teeth While Pregnant

What are three things that you can do to strengthen and protect your unborn child's teeth? The teeth start forming while you are pregnant. One direct way is to eat well. Follow your doctor's advice on what to eat and what not to eat. This is important for so many reasons. One of them is to provide your child with the nutrients needed to have a healthy mouth and healthy teeth.

Another thing to do is to take care of your own teeth. Take care of your teeth while you're pregnant because, first of all, you're developing the right habits. As we said about modelling, if you have the right habits, it will be much easier for you to pass them on to your child than if you're trying to make him/her do things without an example. Try to develop the right habits. When you develop the right oral hygiene habits, this will lead to having a healthy mouth and gums. Gum disease and mouth inflammation

have been associated with many complications in pregnancies. Having healthy teeth and healthy gums is important to have while you're pregnant.

From where will the child get his first bacteria in his mouth? Probably, he'll get it from his parents. This is another reason you have to make sure that you're taking good care of your teeth and keeping them regularly as clean as possible. There's a lot of research on the relationship between the caregiver's oral health and the child's oral health and the transmission of bacteria, and the tools that we use to quantify the risk of developing decay.

Chapter Ten

The First Dental Visit For the Child

What should the parent expect? You're coming for the first visit and the first time we see you, and there is no specific complaint; you want a check-up and a very easy and smooth dental visit. This is our favourite visit because it allows us to meet you, meet the family, and meet the child in a situation where there's no sense of urgency. There is no pain. There is no trauma. It's usually a very positive visit. Please be sure to visit your dentist for a routine initial visit; try not to make the first visit an emergency visit.

The other kind of initial visit that we get is in the case of an emergency, and here is what usually happens. The child hasn't been sleeping or is swollen for the past day or night, so they need to do something right now. We are prepared for these two visits, although they are very different

What should the parent expect? On the first visit, they should expect a check-up. The dentist will take a look at the child's teeth. We will ask them a lot of questions about the child's medical history, the family's medical history, eating habits, oral hygiene habits, dental history, etc. We're trying to assess their risks of developing dental decay. If they need any treatment, we're going to create the treatment plan, then explain it and agree on the sequence of treatment or prevention, and we're going to start booking appointments in the future.

If it's an emergency appointment, we will quickly and carefully proceed to the point where it's safe to provide the treatment needed. We want to provide the treatment as soon as possible as it is an emergency visit. After that, when the emergency has been addressed and everything has passed, in a separate visit, we want to discuss what we're going to do in the future regarding any other treatment needed.

What Do Parents Need to Bring?

Just don't tell your children any bad stories, please. In fact, please use positive stories, positive reinforcement for a visit, and promises of good things. There is no harm in some external motivation. Explaining why you're going there: "We're going to the dentist's office exactly as we go to the pediatrician to have our bodies checked and our general health checked. He is a doctor for teeth. He is going to take a look at your teeth. He's going to tell us their number, their shape, their colour. He's going to see if there are any cavities, anything that needs to be done."

Sometimes we ask about the child's favourite nickname, the child's dental history, if he's gone to any dentist before, and any previous experience. We want to know as much as possible about our new child patient and their dental history, so when we start talking to him or the parents, everything should seem familiar to him. We want to limit the new things the child will encounter that day. It's enough that everything that will be done on that day will be new to him.

Our Wish for You

We wish that everyone would understand the importance of internal motivation in general. Good habits can be one of the best gifts you can give to your children, and we hope you are talking about oral hygiene habits.

We wish that all parents would know that dentistry changed decades ago. Today, it's painless dentistry, and every dentist is usually trying to achieve the highest standard of care. We wish that patients know how easy it is to prevent dental cavities and most of the dental problems you see with very simple daily habits. Instead of waiting until the disease happens, start talking about the treatment that can be provided.

We wish the myths out there that are leaving people scared of the dentist would disappear and, of course, for people to know the reality of good dental care.

How to Keep your Kid's Teeth Safe & Healthy from Birth through Adolescence

We all know being a parent doesn't come with an instruction manual! Most things we have to figure out along the way. Wouldn't it be nice if we had a guide to show us where the pitfalls in life are and how we can avoid making painful mistakes?

Although there isn't a Guide to Life that covers all the ins and outs we'll face as parents, there is a Guide for Parents when it comes to raising kids with healthy teeth.

Our hope for you is you'll use this book as your guide and continue to refer back to it as your child grows. Whether it's to prepare for losing their first tooth or protecting their teeth when they join their first "contact sport" team, we have answers to all your child's dental needs.

To learn more about the ideas discussed in this book, here's what you do next.

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