



Meet the dentist

As soon as you see teeth, book that first appointment.

BY LISA EVANS

Excitement over the appearance of baby's first tooth may be hampered by the knowledge that a trip to the dentist is in order. The Canadian Dental Association recommends baby's first dental visit be six months after the appearance of the first tooth or at 12 months of age, whichever comes first. Toronto pediatric dentist Shonna Masse says while adults may shudder at the thought of visiting the dentist, baby's first dental check-up is nothing to fear.

Here's what to expect on your baby's first visit:

In most cases, pediatric dentists will conduct a pillow exam on patients under the age of two. Baby's head rests on a pillow that lies on the dentist's lap

while parents stand overhead to soothe and distract them with songs or toys.

The dentist will conduct a quick check-up, examining teeth for signs of early decay and malformations. Depending on the condition of the teeth, the dentist may choose to do a cleaning and will model proper teeth brushing technique to parents. Exams for infants as young as 18 months take as little as five minutes. "They don't have many teeth yet," says Dr. Masse.

To calm little ones' nerves, dentists follow the "tell, show, do" approach. "If we're going to brush their teeth, we'll tell them how we're going to do it, show it on their hand and then we'll do it on their teeth," says Dr. Masse.

Having older siblings take their turn in the dentist's chair first can also help ease anxiety. Little ones get particularly excited when they watch their sibling pick a prize from the treasure chest at the end of the visit. Reading books about going to the dentist help play up excitement. *Dora the Explorer's Show Me Your Smile* is a big hit amongst Dr. Masse's patients.

Follow-up visits are recommended every six months. "The mouth is changing so quickly and if cavities do start, they spread quicker than in adult mouths," says Dr. Masse. ○

 For more on keeping baby healthy, go to ParentsCanada.com/baby

PROTECT baby's teeth

Childhood dental decay is a major concern among dentists. Here's how you can keep your baby's teeth healthy:

- **AVOID BEDTIME BOTTLES.** Fermentable carbohydrates (fructose in juice and lactose in milk) bathe the teeth in sugar all night long and are a major contributor to early dental decay. Filling nighttime bottles with water is best, but pediatric dentist Shonna Masse recommends brushing baby's teeth or wiping gums with a warm cloth after feedings of milk, breast milk, formula or juice.
- **TEACH ORAL HYGIENE EARLY.** Dr. Masse began brushing her two- and five-year-olds' teeth with a soft bristle toothbrush as soon as their first tooth appeared, and flossing as soon as there were two teeth that touched. Introducing the toothbrush early can help ward off future tantrums.
- **AVOID STICKY CANDIES.** Gummy candies and the like glue to enamel, making it impossible to remove sugar from the teeth without brushing.
- **BRUSH WITH WATER.** If your child is averse to the taste or texture of toothpaste, Dr. Masse says you can still do a good job brushing with two minutes using only water. "It's not toothpaste that cleans the teeth; it's the mechanical movement of the brush that removes plaque," she says.
- **LOOK FOR RESOURCES.** Reading about dental visits can help. *Chico's First Trip to the Dentist* is available at ChicosAdventures.com.

