



AUSTRALIAN DENTAL  
ASSOCIATION INC.

Babies and Toddlers

# When should my child first see the dentist?



It's easy to assume that until your child has a full set of teeth that there is no need to see the dentist. The reality is dentistry isn't just about teeth! It's about gums, lips, and the inside of the mouth. At each and every visit, whether it is for you or your child, your dentist will be checking the entire mouth in their preventative checks, so it's silly to wait too long between visits.

## When to see the dentist

As a rule of thumb it is time for a dental visit when your baby's first tooth becomes visible or they reach 12 months old – whichever comes first. If you notice anything you think is out of the ordinary before this time it's better to be safe than sorry, so book an appointment straight away.

The earlier your child visits the dentist the better. Prevention is better than cure and early dental visits will help protect your child from tooth decay.

## Your baby's first dental visit

Your little one might fuss during their dental visit. This is the same as when they might fuss at a restaurant, or the hairdresser, or anywhere else you'd rather they were quiet. Don't worry, this is completely normal and the dental team is trained to make sure your baby is as comfortable as possible during their exam. Crying and screaming doesn't mean your baby is in pain and the dentist will always be as gentle as possible.

Just remember - this is a momentous occasion! It is a milestone in your life as a parent and should be remembered, just like a first hair cut or their first day at school. Take photos and write about the experience. Either you'll get a lovely first memory to reflect upon, or some great material for their 21st birthday!

As parents it is your responsibility to use the first dental visit to become well informed about your child's oral health. Your dentist will take a full medical history and look at factors such as your child's overall health and development. Your dentist may discuss;

- Teething
- Brushing techniques
- Bite (how your child's teeth will come together)
- Soft tissues such as gums and cheeks
- Habits such as thumb sucking

- Risk of decay and how to prevent it
- Prevention of trauma to your child's mouth
- Nutritional advice

Listen to this advice and follow it. Your dentist has your child's best interests at heart and wants to make sure that good habits are formed early.

## Preparing for future dental visits

Parents play a very important role in making visits to the dentist a positive and enjoyable experience. It is very important that when you talk about the dentist that you use positive and child-friendly terms, like; "seeing the tooth fairy's friend" or "going for a ride in the dental chair".

Whatever you do, don't use the dentist as a deterrent! Threats like "if you don't brush your teeth the dentist will pull them out" are unlikely to change behaviour but will certainly reinforce any fear. Refrain from telling stories about bad dental experiences (even if you've had one yourself) or using words like "needle", "pull", or "drill" as this will only cause your child to become fearful and scared.

In the lead up to the first dental visit you could 'play dentist' at home and count your child's teeth and explain that the dentist takes care of our teeth. Try not to go into too much detail; the dental team is well-trained to be able to talk with children. They will explain who they are and what they are trying to do at a level your child can understand and relate to. If you are nervous or anxious about the visit this can rub off on your child, so it's best to stay positive and let the professionals do what they do best.

## THE 5 DON'TS OF DENTAL VISITS

1. Don't tell your child to be brave (they already are).
2. Don't bribe your child.
3. Don't tell your child that it won't hurt (or it will).
4. Don't use the dentist as a deterrent or punishment.
5. Don't be anxious yourself.

[facebook.com/HealthyTeethAustralia](https://www.facebook.com/HealthyTeethAustralia)

[twitter.com/AUS\\_Dental](https://twitter.com/AUS_Dental)

For more information on oral health and looking after your teeth, visit [www.ada.org.au](http://www.ada.org.au)