

Cy-Fair dentists agree that good habits and regular check-ups early on will help keep smiles healthy

A photograph of two young girls with long brown hair, smiling and brushing their teeth. The girl on the left is wearing a solid red t-shirt and holding a yellow toothbrush. The girl on the right is wearing a red t-shirt with a colorful patterned band across the chest and holding a pink and blue toothbrush. They are both looking towards the camera.

# *Smiling Cy-Fair Cuties*

*Dental Care for Your  
Children Begins Early*

Written by Donna Kay Moore

As parents, most of us are very meticulous about regular visits to the pediatrician. But are we as diligent about visiting the dentist with our kids? Parents have many questions about how to take care of their children's teeth. When should they start brushing? What kind of toothpaste is best? Knowing the answers to these questions can help you keep your kids' teeth healthy and cavity free. "The lifetime impact of poor dental habits for children can be that the same bad habits carry over into adulthood, causing early tooth loss," says Dr. Kyle Todd of Cypress Springs Family Dentistry.

## Finding the Right Dentist

When choosing a dentist for your child, do your research, seeking out credible sources, suggests DDS Michelle Lin of Cypress Orthodontic and Pediatric Dentistry. "You can call the office for your dentist's educational background, or search the dentist through official websites for his or her dental state license, dental board [accreditation], or dental academy [information]," she says.

Find a dentist who specializes in working with children, too. Pediatric dentists are general dentists who complete two or more years of training after dental school. They receive a detailed education in childhood development, orthodontics and child psychology. During this training they work only with children. Because of this, they gain experience in dealing with kids during different developmental stages. A pediatric dentist uses special equipment for children, such as smaller x-ray film and smaller drills. Many offer educational materials to help both the child and parent learn about dental hygiene. Some pediatric dentists see patients until the age of 16, while others treat them right through the college years.

Many general dentists, also called family dentists, have also worked with children for years. Often a family dentist is able to treat an entire family at one location, which is convenient.

## Scheduling the First Visit

Children should have their first visit to the dentist when they are 1 year old or at the first signs of teeth. The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry states that children should see a dentist when they get their first tooth and no later than one year of age. Todd also recommends children first see the dentist at 1 year old, and Celina Longoria, DDS, of Longoria Dentistry, recommends parents take their children to the dentist as soon as their first teeth emerge.

Both Longoria and Todd recommend check-ups once every six months. "I find it extremely important to take your children to the dentist every six months," says Longoria. "That way, if there is any decay, it can be diagnosed easy and taken care of as soon as possible." And if you suspect your child may need orthodontics, take them to their general dentist as soon as possible for an exam and a referral to an orthodontist.

## Spotting Problems Early

Parents should watch out for signs such as bleeding gums and chalky, orange, or brown stains on their children's teeth as signs of dental problems. Regular visits can help catch problems early on, says Todd. "The most common problem I see with regard to poor dental health for children is waiting too long to have their first visit," he says. "Many of the bigger problems we see could have been prevented if we saw the child sooner."

Local dentist Celina Longoria with one of her young patients



With routine check-ups, dentists are able to head off problems early



Crowded teeth in a child's mouth can also cause decay, especially if the child is not flossing between the tight spaces. "Parents should always help their children brush and floss to prevent decay," says Longoria. "Floss aids are very helpful, since children's mouths are usually very small."

Another common mistake parents make when it comes to kids' dental health is assuming that cavities in their baby teeth will not affect adult dentition, Lin says. "Dental caries are like weeds in the mouth that spread from one tooth to another," she says. "Therefore, the existence of untreated baby tooth decay can result in adult dental caries when adult teeth erupt in the mouth."

## Establishing Good Habits

Establishing good dental hygiene early on can set the stage for better oral health in adulthood. There are four components that make up good dental habits that you should teach to your children early on.

**Brushing** - Tooth brushing is one of the most important tasks for good oral health and should be done at least twice a day, according to Longoria. It's key for parents to make brushing part of their child's daily routine, Todd adds. "Parents should set a good example by brushing or flossing at the same time as the child," he says. "Also, they have toothbrushes that play songs, which kids enjoy."

Be aware that many types of toothpaste can damage young smiles. They contain harsh abrasives, which can wear away young tooth enamel. When selecting toothpaste, pick one that is recommended by the American Dental Association as shown



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Parent assisted flossing should begin as soon as teeth start emerging



Choose a dentist office with child friendly amenities and staff

on the box and tube. Children should spit out toothpaste after brushing to avoid getting too much fluoride. If your child is too young or unable to spit out toothpaste, you may choose to use a fluoride-free toothpaste.

**Flossing** - Parent-assisted flossing should begin as soon as two teeth emerge next to each other, and should be done at least once a day, Longoria says. Independent flossing should occur when children have the ability to do it on their own - often by six years of age.

**Diet** - Healthy eating helps promote healthy teeth. Like the rest of the body, the teeth, bones, and tissues of the mouth need a well-balanced diet. Children should eat a variety of foods from the five major food groups. "Stay away from sticky, chewy foods that stay on teeth and can cause cavities," Longoria advises. "Stay away from juices with high sugar content. Have your child drink lots of water to materialize the pH in their mouth after eating or drinking, if there is not a brush available."

**Regular checkups** - Without routine visits to the dentist, your child could be dealing with dental problems long-term that could have been caught early and possibly corrected. It is suggested that you and your children visit the dentist every six months for a dental exam and cleaning. During these exams your child's teeth will be carefully inspected, cleaned, and checked for cavities. If the dentist finds anything wrong with your child's teeth, it can be taken care of early.

"Dental care at an early age is important, because prevention is the key to a lifetime of healthy dental habits," says Lin. "When parents are informed early on how to prevent childhood caries, this education will be passed on to their children and their children's children, as well." **CFM**

*DONNA KAY MOORE is a Cy-Fair resident and mom. She dedicates this story to Macey, who has a great smile.*

## Considerations for Choosing a Dentist

- ✓ Ask your friends, family, and co-workers for recommendations
- ✓ Consider the dentist's level of expertise and experience
- ✓ Pay attention to the cleanliness of the dental practice
- ✓ Does the dentist show respect for you and your time?
- ✓ Does the dentist consider your dental and medical history important?
- ✓ Check to see if the dentist uses up to date technology, materials, and procedures
- ✓ Look at the dentist's range of treatment options and estimates