

# THE ORAL HEALTH EXPERT

In honor of Children's Dental Health Month, we're discussing how to keep kids' smiles healthy and strong by preventing baby bottle tooth decay and choosing the right dentist.

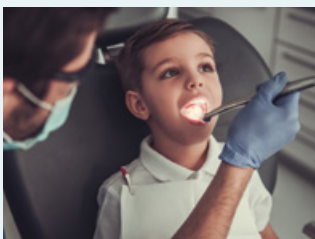
DELTA DENTAL OF ARIZONA

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## Love Your Smile: Practice Preventive Care



Show your smile some love by giving it what it really needs: preventive dental care. Regular preventive care can help you avoid costly and serious dental problems and keep your smile shining.

**Schedule routine dental appointments.** Visit the dentist regularly to help ensure that any oral health problems are detected and taken care of before they become more serious and expensive. During routine visits, your dentist will screen for oral cancers and symptoms of other health issues that can be difficult to spot on your own.

**Consider fluoride treatments.** Fluoride is a mineral that helps teeth become more resistant to cavities. Your family can take advantage of its benefits through fluoridated toothpaste and most tap water, but some people could use additional fluoride treatments. Talk to your dentist about whether you or your family members should have fluoride treatments.

**Ask about sealants for children's teeth.** Sealants are plastic coatings that protect difficult to reach areas on teeth from decay. They are applied to permanent molars as soon as they erupt in the mouth, usually between the ages of 6 to 8 for first molars and 10 to 12 for second molars. While sealants are not necessary for all children, they are particularly beneficial to those who are at higher risk for tooth decay. Ask the dentist if sealants are a good choice for your children.

**Use your dental benefits.** At dental appointments, make sure you take full advantage of the benefits your dental plan provides. The good news is that many plans cover cleanings and exams at 100%, and some cover fluoride treatments and sealants as well.

Of course, it's also important to maintain a daily routine of brushing twice daily and flossing once a day.

# THE BASICS OF BABY BOTTLE TOOTH DECAY



When parents put their little ones to sleep, sometimes they leave them with a bottle. While that might be soothing as they drift off to dreamland, leaving a bottle in the crib can be problematic for tiny teeth. In celebration of National Children's Dental Health Month this February, take a moment to brush up on the basics of baby bottle tooth decay.

## What is baby bottle tooth decay?

Put simply, baby bottle tooth decay means cavities in baby teeth and can begin soon after teeth appear. It occurs when a baby's teeth are exposed to sugar for extended periods like at naptime or overnight.<sup>1</sup> During this time, sugar pools around teeth and attacks enamel. With enough exposure, it can lead to high amounts of tooth decay.<sup>2</sup> This sugar can be introduced from baby bottles with liquids such as milk, formula or juice.

## Why is it a problem if baby teeth are going to fall out anyway?

Even though baby bottle tooth decay relates to teeth that eventually fall out, it can still create lasting consequences. Healthy baby teeth are essential for chewing, speaking and smiling.<sup>3</sup> When kids' oral health is compromised, they may experience difficulty with these important aspects of growing up. Unhealthy baby teeth can also set the stage for tooth crowding or crooked teeth when adult teeth come in. If the problem isn't addressed, it could lead to pain or infection, so it's always a good decision to stay vigilant about oral health from the very start.<sup>4</sup>

## How can I prevent baby bottle tooth decay?

You have several options to keep your baby's teeth free from decay. The best way is to avoid putting your baby to sleep with a bottle. Or, make sure to only fill the bottle with water.<sup>5</sup> No matter what time of day it is, be especially careful about juice because it has high amounts of sugar. Make sure to limit juice intake to no more than six ounces per day for preschoolers and 12 ounces for older children.<sup>6</sup> If you do allow juice, it's better to serve it in a cup rather than a bottle. Most children should be able to drink out of a cup after their first birthday.

Preventive care like brushing and regular checkups is key, as well. Experts recommend scheduling your baby's first visit within six months of the first tooth and no later than the first birthday.<sup>7</sup> Clean their teeth according to infant dental care recommendations. As soon as baby teeth appear, you should begin brushing them with a baby toothbrush and a smear of toothpaste about the size of a grain of rice.<sup>8</sup> Around age 3 you can begin using a pea-sized amount of toothpaste. Begin flossing when your child has two teeth that touch.

By keeping your baby's teeth safe now, you can help them develop a happy and healthy smile when their adult teeth appear!

# SMILE STATS



90% of children have dental coverage.<sup>9</sup> Make the most of that coverage by taking your child to regular dental appointments.

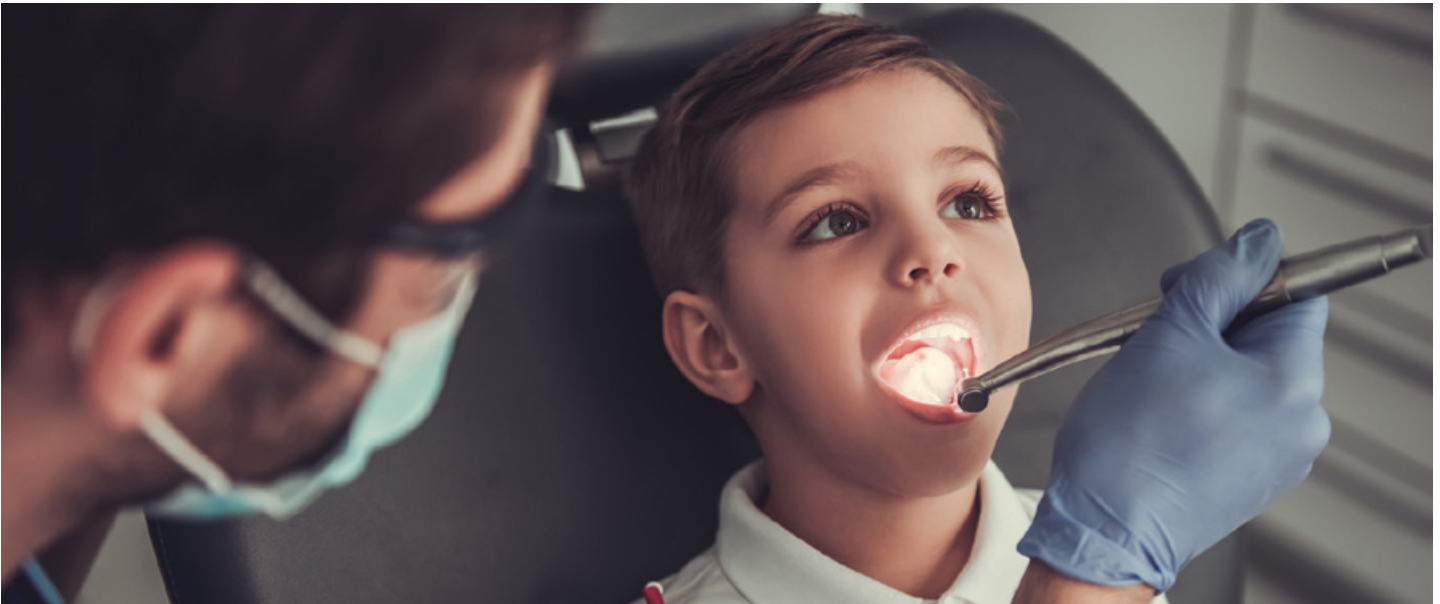


For children, cavities are one of the most common chronic issues.<sup>10</sup> Preventing decay starts when the very first tooth erupts.



Even though they have similar names, sweet potatoes and white potatoes belong to different families.<sup>11</sup> Whip up some sweet potatoes for a rich helping of smile-friendly nutrients.

# Choosing Between a General and Pediatric Dentist



When looking for a dentist for your children, it can be tough to know who to see. Should you search for a general family dentist or would your children benefit from pediatric care? You can't go wrong either way, but it's good to have all the facts before you make a decision.

## Similarities

Both accredited general and pediatric dentists have the training necessary to offer a high level of care to children. If you have an existing relationship with a family dentist you trust to provide quality care, that dentist can be a great option for your littlest family members.

## Differences

While general dentistry training covers dental care for children, pediatric dentists spend at least two additional years studying how to care for younger patients. Once they have completed their training, they provide primary and specialty care for children only.<sup>12</sup> As a result, they have smaller equipment specifically designed for children's mouths. These are especially helpful when children need more complicated dental care such as root canals.<sup>13</sup>

## Special Needs

Pediatric dentists are also a great option for addressing certain needs children may have. Some kids have particularly high levels of dental anxiety. While general dentists often provide assistance with this anxiety, pediatric dentists may be specially equipped to reduce anxiety for children with toys or music that help them relax.<sup>14</sup> They're also trained to provide care for children with special needs like cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, muscular dystrophy, learning disabilities and others.<sup>15</sup> These conditions can be associated with dental problems such as gum disease, so oral health care is especially important.

## Dental Benefits

If you've decided to visit a pediatric dentist, learn how your dental benefits apply. Some plans limit referrals to specialists or may require you to have a referral from your general dentist. Others allow families to maintain a pediatric dentist as their primary dentist.<sup>16</sup> Check your plan to make sure. In any case, visit a specialist that participates in your plan's network. Delta Dental's website allows you to search for in-network specialists close to you.

Whether you choose a general or pediatric dentist, scheduling the first visit early is crucial. The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry recommends all babies see the dentist within six months of getting their first tooth but no later than their first birthday. Keep your children smiling into adulthood by finding a dentist you trust today.

# MOUTH-HEALTHY RECIPE: MASHED SWEET POTATOES

## Ingredients:



1/4 teaspoon Kosher salt



1/4 to 1/3 cup milk



2 pounds sweet potatoes, peeled and cut into 1-inch chunks



2 tablespoons salted butter

## Directions:

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Carefully add sweet potatoes. Reduce heat to medium and cook uncovered for 15 minutes or until sweet potatoes are tender. Drain sweet potatoes in a colander. Shake to remove water. Place sweet potatoes in a large bowl and add 1/4 cup milk, butter and salt. Use a potato masher or hand blender to mash until smooth. Add remaining milk if necessary. Serve warm.<sup>17</sup>

## WANT MORE ORAL HEALTH TIPS AND NEWS?

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[deltadentalazblog.com](http://deltadentalazblog.com)



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## SOURCES

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