



The Value Of GOOD TEETH

Let Dr. Cheng Eng Wah show you how to put a cost-effective dental plan in place for your child.

Public or private school, violin or piano lessons, enrichment or tuition, local certification or from abroad, there is definitely a lot that parents need to consider in raising children these days, all of which comes with a price especially in an affluent society like Singapore. It is only natural for parents to want the best for their children and careful planning is necessary to ensure your dollar stretches as far down the road as possible.

Equally important for your child's development are their health needs, which evolve through different stages of growth. Apart from education, healthcare and medical expenses are usually the largest financial concerns in any family. When it comes to oral care, here are some useful principles you can put in place to reduce

unexpected spending and maximise the potential of natural teeth.

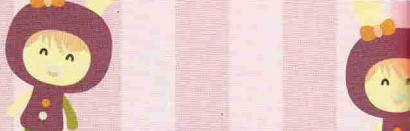
Practise preventive oral care

Prevention in the case of oral health, is not only better than cure, it is absolutely vital. We are given only one set of permanent teeth that is designed to last us a lifetime and how it is cared for daily will reflect in the number of good years it serves us.

To better care for your child's teeth, it is important to have a basic understanding of how teeth develop and deteriorate. The very moment your child's first tooth surfaces, it is already at risk of tooth decay. Cavities form when bacteria inside our mouth react to food residue, producing acids that cause teeth to demineralise.

The only way to prevent decay is to remove the bacteria and food remains by regular brushing and flossing. Make a conscious effort to instill in your child the habit of brushing from early on. While it may take some time before it becomes a natural part of their routine, the time and energy spent is well worth the investment.

As part of the plan to encourage positive oral care habits, allow your child to participate in putting together his or her own oral care kit. This will help shape a sense of ownership and motivate your child to eventually brush on his or her own. A basic kit should include an age-appropriate toothbrush, toothpaste, a gargle cup and dental floss. Bear in mind that a toothbrush becomes less effective when the bristles



are frayed, so be sure to replace toothbrushes every 3 to 4 months.

Your child's dental healthcare plan should include regular dental check ups. The reason dentists recommend routine examinations every six months is to enable early detection of problems that may require more costly treatments. Take for example a simple cavity; when detected early it only costs between \$60 to \$120 to fill, while a root canal procedure to treat a tooth that is badly decayed or infected can cost several times more. For that reason, early intervention can save both time and money in the long run.

In addition to gaining feedback on the effectiveness of your child's teeth cleaning regime, regular oral examinations also allow the dentist to make sure that your child's teeth are developing properly and detect any abnormalities in the gums, jaw and oral tissues.

Recognise what's essential

As your child matures there will come a time when you may have to consider their need for orthodontic treatment. Most of the common teeth alignment problems faced today include reverse bite, over bite, cross bite, open bite and gapped teeth. While it holds true that a set of well-aligned teeth improves one's appearance, there are other equally important reasons why dentists recommend braces.

When teeth overlap each other in an overcrowded situation, brushing and flossing are more difficult and this will likely cause decay and gum disease. If such a condition persists, it can result in missing teeth and the need for prosthetic teeth later in life. Even though dentures, bridges and implants serve as solutions, there is nothing stronger and more durable

than natural teeth. Properly aligned teeth are also easier to clean and less likely to trap food particles, retain less plaque and have fewer problems staying cavity-free.

Sometimes children may find it difficult to chew tough or fibrous foods due to reduced strength in their bite. This can be caused by gum disease, which is often the result of poor teeth alignment. As a result, meal times can be quite stressful with their refusal to eat anything but soft foods, which can affect their nourishment.

Properly aligned teeth have also been found to improve diction, which your child might be struggling with if he or she has an open bite. This can have an impact on social relationships and performance in school. Orthodontics can help improve the pronunciation of words, making clear speech and language development less of a challenge.

There are number of teeth-straightening options that are now available. If your children become self-conscious about wearing metal braces as they get older, another option for

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their teenage years is invisible aligners such as Invisalign, which uses a series of custom-made clear aligners to move teeth into place. This system is demonstrated to be a comfortable and practical choice for those seeking more discreet teeth-straightening treatments.

Correcting your child's teeth alignment to improve self-image, reduce risk of decay and recover function and diction may be an essential part of your child's oral health needs. It is necessary to recognise the benefits that come with this investment.

Finding a capable dental practitioner for the family is just as important as establishing an effective oral care routine. You will need to identify a dentist your child is comfortable with and build that trust. A good dentist is also one who believes in a preventive approach to oral care. He or she should be willing to provide you with solutions to dental problems and strive to preserve natural teeth as much as possible.

Taking all these into consideration, be sure to cultivate in your family a positive outlook towards oral health to minimise the need to spend on solving dental issues that are, to begin with, preventable. **LWB**

This article was contributed by Dr. Cheng Eng Wah, who is the Principal Partner and Founder of I.Dental Surgeons Pte Ltd.