

In The

Dentist's Chair



GOOD DENTAL HABITS SHOULD BE INSTILLED IN YOUR CHILD FROM A YOUNG AGE. BUT HOW DO YOU TAKE THAT FIRST STEP WHEN YOU'RE JUST AS HESITANT?

MELISSA ESPECKERMAN CHECKS OUT SOME DOS AND DON'TS OF YOUR LITTLE ONE'S FIRST DENTAL VISIT.



Q & M Dental Group

After weeks of battling with your little tot's cries as his baby teeth made their first appearance, you realize that you will soon have to face the challenge of bringing him for his first dental appointment. But with everything else that is going on when it comes with coping with a child, your baby's oral health can be easily overlooked. But if you think your young one does not need a dental check, think of all the lollipops and other sugary foods he eats everyday. Even the sugar content of milk can lead to decaying teeth.

Mention the word 'dentist' and some adults shiver with fear. But a trip down the unknown – at least for your child – does not have to be filled with anxiety. Strange looking instruments, bright lights and unfamiliar sounds can all be very overwhelming for your precious little one, so it's important to prepare him for his first visit and get him used to the idea of dental hygiene.

"Keep conversation about visits to the dentist simple and casual. Parents can also try preparing their child at home by asking the child to open his mouth to count his teeth," advises Dr Chong Ling Sharon, dental surgeon at Q & M Dental Group.



Smilefocus Family Dentistry

The First Step

It is recommended that a child should make his first trip down to the smile doctor when he is around a year old. "At this age, the dentist will advise on any habits that may need attention, such as thumb sucking, overuse of pacifiers and/or lack of oral hygiene," says Dr Ong Yean Sze, specialist in paediatric dentistry at Smilefocus Family Dentistry.

Getting him into the dentist's chair without any tantrums starts at home, so practicing good dental habits from a young age will definitely help. "Start your kids off early and get them into brushing their teeth twice daily by doing it with them. For very young children, it may be a good idea to allow the child to brush the parent's teeth before attempting to brush theirs," suggests principal partner and founder of I.Dental Surgeons Pte Ltd,



Dr Cheng Eng Wah. As most children are known to follow by example, always ensure you practice good oral hygiene habits as well.

With good dental care from such a young age, not only will it instil in your kids good dental hygiene habits, it may prevent possible dental problems, as he grows older as well. These habits should start while your child is still an infant because even your newborn is not safe from harmful bacteria. While still

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in your womb, your baby develops his primary teeth but they're inside his jaw till it erupts. But you don't need to brush what you can't see.

Says Dr Ng Jing Jing, paedodontist at the Oral Care Centre, "For an infant, a cloth can be used to wipe the gums and tongue after milk. This can allow the child to learn that the oral cavity has to be cleansed after meals and make the introduction of brushing easier when their teeth erupt."

Before D-Day

Getting your child comfortable before he sits in what may seem like a rather intimidating chair for the first time may be quite a challenge but telling him what to expect will certainly help.

Books such as, *Going to the Dentist* by Anne Civardi, *Show Me Your Smile* by Christine Ricci and *The Berenstain Bears Visit the Dentist* by Stan Berenstain are just some books that you can read to Junior to get him acquainted with visiting the dentist. "It definitely helps when parents paint a positive picture about dental visits. Make these visits an event you do together and look forward to," says Dr Cheng.

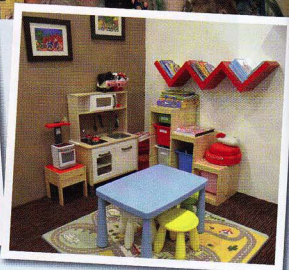
But Dr Ong advises to refrain from threatening your child with a dental visit when he refuses to brush his teeth or misbehaves. Some other don'ts to remember include not waiting for an emergency to be the first visit to the dentist and to not share negative experiences or mention words that may instil unnecessary fear before and after the check-up.

Instead, what you could do is let your child tag along when someone else in the family is due for a dental visit. Watching a parent or an elder sibling go through a dental check-up will give him the courage to take to the chair himself when the time comes and it familiarises him with the clinic as well.

"Short simple visits are important as children have shorter attention span and a visit to the dentist can be daunting for a little one. Parents should be prepared to bring the child in for multiple visits as these allow the child to become familiar with the dentist and the procedures. It helps to diminish or eliminate fear in children who have had a previous traumatic episode," says Dr Cheng.

Open Wide

The day has finally come and it's time to trot your tot off to the dentist. But before you start worrying about the hum of the drill or the rattle



of his instruments, the first visit at the dentist is usually about familiarising your child with his new environment.

Dr Ong says, "A child's first visit to the dentist will be a 'show and tell' experience – a ride in the chair, getting used to the dentist, the environment and equipment, and opening their mouth to have their teeth counted and checked."

"For children below the age of four, the dentist might request for parents to sit with their child if necessary, giving the child a sense of security. It is important for parents to raise any concerns they might have regarding their child's dental health to the dentist, but avoid using words like 'injections', 'extractions' and 'pulling of teeth'," says Dr Ng.

However, if your child's first visit does not go as planned, Dr Cheng advises, "Don't force the child to do anything he refuses to do. If he

decides not to open up his mouth or sit in the dental chair, parents can try to coax him into it. Otherwise, reschedule the appointment for a time when he is better prepared."

A trip to the dentist may sound rather intimidating but kids definitely have something to look forward to. "Your child will usually be given some fun presents such as a toothbrush and a sticker. While waiting, kids can occupy their time with movies, books, toys, colouring pencils, Game Boy players and XBOX consoles, which can be found in some dentist clinics," continues Dr Ong. And while they're having their teeth checked, they can even watch their favourite cartoons on TV!

A positive first experience at the dentist will ease any fear your child may have and with little treats at the end of his check-up, he may even look forward to his next visit. So book Junior's dental appointment today! ■