

# Smilematters

## PATIENT FACT SHEET

## February Is National Children's Dental Health Month

February is National Children's Dental Health Month, and the Michigan Dental Association reminds you that it's easy to help to make your child's smile last a lifetime. A balanced diet, limited snacks, daily brushing and flossing, and regular dental checkups are the keys to a lifetime of healthy teeth and gums.

"A Healthy Smile Looks Good Up Close" is the theme for this month's celebration. Attitudes and habits established at an early age are critical to maintain good oral health throughout life. Check out these helpful children's dental health habits:

### **Babies and Bottles**

The baby teeth are very important for chewing, speaking and appearance. One serious form of children's tooth decay is called baby bottle tooth decay, or early childhood tooth decay. This condition is caused by frequent and long exposures of an infant's teeth to liquids that contain sugar, such as milk (including breast milk), formula, fruit juice and other sweetened drinks. If you must give your baby a bottle at naptime or bedtime, make sure it contains only water.

### **Sealing Out Decay**

As your child's permanent teeth come in, talk to us about having dental sealants applied to protect teeth from decay. A dental sealant is a clear material that is applied to the chewing surfaces of the back teeth, where decay most often occurs. The sealant acts as a barrier, protecting teeth from bacteria and the acid that attacks enamel.

### **Accidents Can Happen**

Active children require proper mouth protection to prevent injuries to the face, tongue and lips — injuries that could include broken or knocked out teeth and even jaw fractures. Ask us for

advice on the proper mouthguard for your child, whether he or she is playing a contact sport like football or just having fun bike riding or inline skating. If an accident does happen, be sure to call us as soon as possible.

### **The Diet-Dental Health Connection**

We all know that good nutrition is essential to maintain healthy teeth and gums throughout life.

**Nutrition and Tooth Development** — A balanced diet is necessary for teeth to develop properly. For strong, decay-resistant teeth, children need protein, vitamins and minerals (especially calcium, phosphorus and proper levels of fluoride).

**Nutrition and Tooth Decay** — When you eat foods or drink liquids containing sugars and starches, the bacteria in the plaque — that thin sticky film that forms on the teeth — produce acids that attack tooth enamel. If you often indulge in sugary or starchy foods or liquids, especially between meals and don't brush your teeth, the result may be tooth decay and possibly tooth loss.

**Nutrition Habits and Healthy Teeth** — Get in the habit of checking food labels for sugar content. Eat foods that contain sugars with meals, and avoid between-meal snacks. Avoid sugar-containing cough drops, hard candy and breath mints that stay in the mouth a long time and increase the likelihood of decay. Research indicates that certain foods such as cheese, peanuts, or sugar-free gum may be "tooth friendly."