

Dental Health

Healthy teeth are important for children's nutrition and overall health. Our goal as leaders is to help parents use and teach good dental health practices with their children.

KEY POINTS

- **Dental health affects nutrition.** If teeth are damaged by poor hygiene, it is more difficult to eat. In addition, tooth decay can create infections that cause pain, swelling, and fevers. These infections can spread to other parts of the body.
- **Baby teeth are important to care for.** They keep space in the mouth so adult teeth won't grow too close to each other.
- **Babies should not fall asleep drinking from a bottle.** Baby bottle tooth decay is a big problem, and falling asleep with a bottle in the mouth is the leading cause.
- **Parents should start brushing their child's teeth as soon as the first tooth appears.** Use a small amount of toothpaste with fluoride if possible—for 2 years old and younger, toothpaste used should be the size of a grain of rice; for 3 years old and older, the size of a pea.
- **Start flossing early.** When a child has teeth close enough to touch each other, it is good to start using dental floss if available. Flossing helps remove small pieces of food that brushes can't reach.
- **Avoid sugary snacks and drinks, including sports drinks.** Frequent snacking on sugary foods can cause tooth decay. If decayed teeth are not treated, they can cause pain and serious infections.
- **Where possible, children should have regular checkups with a dentist.** A dentist can find and treat small problems before they become bigger problems. Some areas may have free or reduced-cost dental clinics.



Questions to Prayerfully Consider

- Could members in my area use additional help with dental hygiene?
- What are the best ways to teach dental hygiene to members in my area?
- Where can families take their children to get dental care?



Inspiration from the Scriptures

God has provided us with “the good things which come of the earth ... for food and for raiment, for taste and for smell, to strengthen the body and to enliven the soul” (Doctrine and Covenants 59:17, 19). One way we can enjoy and benefit from the food we eat is by protecting our dental health with good hygiene.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

Consider these ideas and others as you counsel together and pray for guidance.

Leaders

- **Consider which families may not be able to get proper dental care or supplies.** Counsel together to find ways to help families meet their children’s dental needs.
- **Organize workshops to encourage good dental hygiene.** For example, there could be a joint Primary and Relief Society activity including children and mothers. This could include things like a demonstration and letting children practice brushing their teeth.
- **Let parents share ideas** for how to brush young children’s teeth even when the child resists. Here are a few:
 - Make toothbrushing a routine.
 - For children too young to brush their own teeth, try letting them lie with their head in your lap. Let them hold an extra toothbrush while the parent brushes for them.
 - Make brushing and flossing fun with a game or a song.

Ministering Brothers and Sisters

- When you feel it would be helpful, share the “Healthy Teeth” flyer.
- Be open to discuss dental needs the family may want to share.

Share the “Healthy Teeth” handout with members.



LEARN MORE

Learn more about dental health and other ways to improve child nutrition: ChildNutrition.ChurchofJesusChrist.org

