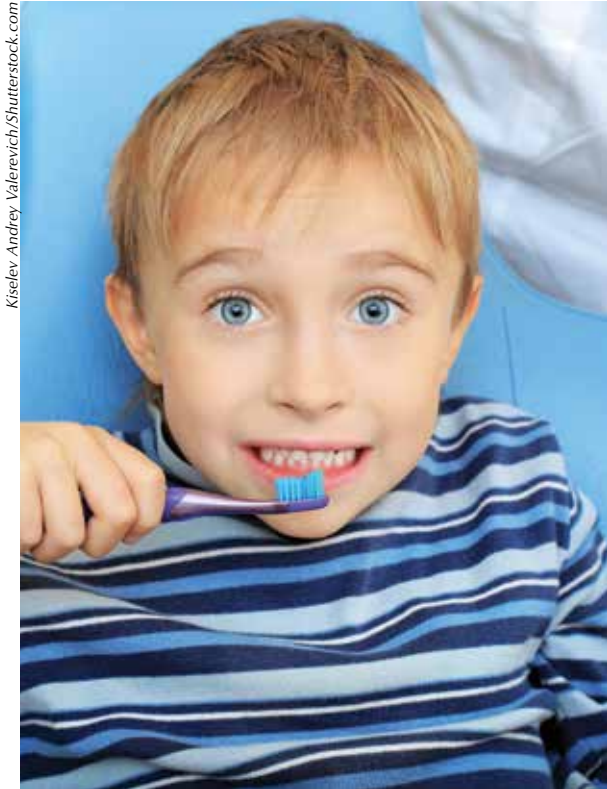


KEEP DECAY AWAY

Kids Do Best with Holistic Dentistry

by Linda Sechrist



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According to a 2012 *New York Times* story, “Preschoolers in Surgery for a Mouthful of Cavities,” more dentists nationwide are recommending that children be administered general anesthesia at hospitals due to the severity of decay.

Such extensive dental work on children is largely preventable. Wise parents encourage their children to develop healthy habits such as brushing teeth at least twice a day; eating fewer sugary snacks and brushing afterwards; limiting fruit juice intake to four ounces a day; and sucking on bacteria-killing xylitol lollipops. Such a routine combined with an initial dentist visit by their first birthday can reduce dental costs, including hospital treatment for extreme decay that can cost thousands of dollars.

Other ways to reduce the too-common incidence of six to 10 childhood cavities include breastfeeding only until baby teeth erupt; avoiding transmission of an anaerobic oral bacteria carried in saliva that’s the leading cause of tooth decay; early interceptive treatment to avoid crowding of teeth; and consulting a nutritionist.

Breastfeeding

Andie Pearson, a doctor of dental medicine and owner of Gained Dental Spa, in Wilmette, Illinois, tells mothers that in the descent through the birth canal, their baby ingests the bacteria necessary to digest breast milk. As teeth later emerge, their gut bacteria also become able to digest solid food. “By the time a child has all 20 baby teeth, between 18 and 30 months, they no longer have the microbial ecology for digesting breast milk and should be weaned. Researchers from

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the University of California-Berkeley have found that the more frequently a mother breastfed her child beyond the second birthday during the day, the greater the child's risk of severe early tooth decay," says Pearson.

Development of facial muscles and bone structure is dependent on chewing and gnawing. "Teething rings facilitate chewing that builds stronger teeth and creates better alignment," she explains. If childhood tooth growth is delayed, Pearson often suggests a chiropractic adjustment if all other developmental areas are normal. "It can help the body relax so that teeth erupt naturally," she advises.

Mouth-to-Mouth

Susan Maples, a doctor of dental surgery and owner of Total Health Dentistry, in Holt, Michigan, notes that *Streptococcus mutans* is the leading reason children are hospitalized today. "Cavities are formed when the rate of decay of the teeth caused by the lactic acid produced by the bacteria exceeds the rate of repair initiated by the phosphate and calcium ions in saliva," she explains.

The unwanted bacteria is transmitted through saliva, which is why adults

should avoid licking spoons or tasting foods before offering them to children between the ages of 1 and 3. "This type of bacteria thrives on sugar, so children shouldn't have lots of sugary drinks and sweet treats," says Maples. Mouth kissing presents a similar risk.

Early Intervention

Kris Kammer, a doctor of dental surgery and owner of Gums of Steel Oral Hygiene Transformation, in Middleton, Wisconsin, learned early in his career to avoid mercury amalgam fillings and early extractions of bicuspids for orthodontic purposes, and that xylitol reduces buildup of plaque bacterial biofilm on teeth. A study published in the *Journal of Dental Research*, supported by findings of a metastudy appearing in *Clinical, Cosmetic and Investigational Dentistry* "shows that regular use of xylitol over six months significantly reduces the *Streptococcus mutans* population," he says.

He also suggests early interceptive treatments which can be performed by general dentists. "Parents don't need to wait for children's teeth to come in crooked and crowded. These issues can be addressed with a removable appliance that expands

the arch in the roof dome, influences bone growth and makes room for incoming teeth," says Kammer. Early proper diet may also help prevent crowding of teeth as well as malocclusion, or misalignment of upper and lower teeth, according to Pearson.

Role Modeling

"Parents play a pivotal role in their children's dental hygiene. They influence how their children care for their teeth, behave in the dentist's office and feel about dental visits," advises Pentti Nupponen, a doctor of dental medicine and owner of the Halifax Center for Holistic & Cosmetic Dentistry, in Halifax, Pennsylvania.

Children should be made familiar with dentistry and taught that they are responsible for their dental hygiene from around age 1. Nupponen explains his gentle method: "I encourage mothers to bring their children along for dental appointments so that they can watch me from their mother's lap. Generally, by the time they are alone in my chair, they aren't frightened."

Linda Sechrist is a senior staff writer for Natural Awakenings. Connect at ItsAllAboutWe.com.

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