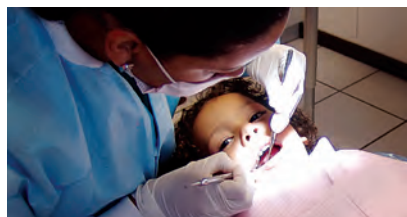


The parent-dentist CONNECTION

Questions moms and dads ask about
their kids' oral health **Ann Chandler, RDH**



PARENTS OFTEN RAISE QUESTIONS when taking their children for dental exams. Here are some common ones I've encountered in my role as a dental hygienist, along with answers to put your mind at ease.



▲ MY DAUGHTER'S SCARED! I HAVE TO GO IN WITH HER.

Children will often pick up on their parents' dental anxiety. You may have passed on your own anxiety to your child without being aware of it. Has she overheard you talking to a friend about "dreading my dental work next week" or that "awful root canal"? Do you react negatively (however slightly) when it's time for your own dental exam? Children often do just fine in the dental chair when parents stay in the waiting room. This also allows the dental team to establish a direct relationship with your child. Prepare your child in a positive, friendly way before going in to see the dentist, then let her try it on her own.

◀ HOW CAN MY SON HAVE LOTS OF PLAQUE ON HIS TEETH? HE BRUSHES AT LEAST TWICE A DAY.

Children need close supervision to be sure they are brushing — and flossing — effectively. No matter the child's age, a parent should always monitor the final result. (Even teenagers need occasional checks.) Don't be afraid to help out, even if your child protests. Red and/or puffy and bleeding gums are signs that your child is not brushing properly. Remember, he can't see the areas he's missing. Right-handed children often miss the right corners of their mouths, while left-handed children do the opposite. Ask your dental professional to help your child perform the correct technique for effective brushing and flossing.

Dr. Reza Nouri, a children's dentist with the Pediatric Dental Group in Vancouver and an assistant clinical professor in the University of British Columbia's Faculty of Dentistry, shares some questions parents often raise in his dental practice.

MY DAUGHTER'S CLASSMATES HAVE LOST TEETH, BUT SHE HASN'T. DOES SHE NEED ANY BABY TEETH TAKEN OUT?

Every child is different, physically and dentally, and her teeth develop at their own pace. As long as we can see permanent teeth developing in their right positions and in the right order on her dental X-rays, we're not concerned. Some children who have small jaws for the size of their teeth may experience a delay in the eruption of the new teeth. In such instances, the dental team may be able to help some of the baby teeth out in order to guide the permanent teeth into better positions.

AREN'T THESE BABY TEETH GOING TO FALL OUT SOON? WHY SHOULD I CONSIDER FIXING THEM?

Baby teeth play many functions in the mouth. Most important, they help the child chew, swallow and talk. They help with the development of the jawbone and provide protection and guidance for the permanent teeth developing below them, maintaining proper spacing in the jaw. If a cavity in a baby tooth is left unattended, it may continue to expand and cause an infection in the gum. This, in turn, can cause a facial infection or damage the adult tooth underneath it. Some of your child's baby teeth may stay in until the age of 12.

MY NEIGHBOUR'S CHILDREN EAT JUNK FOOD AND NEVER GET CAVITIES. MY CHILDREN EAT WELL AND BRUSH BUT THEY STILL GET CAVITIES.

There are many factors that come together to cause cavities. Among these are the nature, shape and position of the teeth, the type and amount of bacteria in a child's mouth, what he eats and how long it takes to eat it, as well as how often and effectively he flosses and brushes. Other variables that affect the overall health of a child's teeth are exposure to strengthening minerals such as calcium, phosphate and fluoride. Certain genetic conditions, or medical conditions such as asthma, can also predispose a child to an increased rate of tooth decay. Ask your dentist if there are any obvious reasons why your child is getting cavities.



▶ In summary, for worry-free dental health in your child, start taking her to the dentist at age one, always check her brushing and flossing, make sure she eats a healthy diet and be positive yourself about dental visits.

