

## When Should The First Dental Visit Be?



In a poll of 100 people in Piscataquis County, that answer can vary quite widely. If the answer is based on two generations ahead of them, it may be try to wait until social security. I just saw a man who hadn't been to the dentist in 35 years.

The baby boomer generation, with a mouth full of silver fillings, commonly develops a cold sweat thinking about the days of their youth, gripping the dental chair as they were injected with large needles and having their teeth drilled - all in an old dental setting that wasn't very comfortable. Fortunately, these baby boomers (now parents or grandparents) desire a kinder and more gentle world for their young ones and ask when they should bring their child in so they may avoid those unpleasant experiences.

The outstanding news now is that the young person who has regularly come to our office since childhood, very rarely graduates from high school with a filling(s) in his/her mouth. Most of the time, when I remove wisdom teeth from these teens graduating from high school, I need to tell them what it feels like to have a numb lip.

This brings us to When Should The First Dental Visit Be?? Your first child's first visit to the dentist should be at 1 1/2 yrs. old. The diet, fluoride regimens and home care instructions given at this visit can allow your children to grow up cavity free. It usually is an appointment to check for/ fill cavities, but rather one for setting the stage in helping your child grow up without any cavities. The fluoride regimen has been changed in the last few years and in towns without fluoridated water (or in towns where children do not drink the town water), it is recommended they begin fluoride at the age of 3 months. The primary reason why the regimen changed is that almost all toothpastes have fluoride in them. The most common reason given as to why children grow up without cavities is that they have a fluoride in their toothpaste and fluoride supplements. It is most important, though, that we only place a small pea size amount of toothpaste on the toothbrush to avoid swallowing too much fluoride. The diet is the most important factor in whether or not your child will have a cavity.

Most all of us have heard of baby bottle syndrome? And amazingly enough, with two busy parents working; it has become a problem once again. Many times, tired parents will allow their child to have a bottle with milk or juice at nighttime to pacify them while they go to sleep. The rule is that as soon as the teeth come in, the only liquid to be placed in the bottle and ingested at will (to pacify or past time) is water. Three of my four children instantly threw the bottle of water when it was passed to them, but my youngest would drink the bottle of water until we finally had to take it away.

Teaching a young parent to clean the baby's teeth is also important. A wet washcloth with clean water can be used to clean the teeth while bathing the baby. There are also small cotton finger holders used for rubbing your baby's teeth. A small, soft toothbrush

also works very well. By age 3 months, it is very important to talk to your dentist or physician to get the proper fluoride in your baby's diet to allow the permanent teeth now growing under the gums, to develop to their optimal health. The dosage increases at age 3 and at age 6, depending upon how much fluoride is in the water.

For a family that has been previously introduced to child preventive dentistry, a first visit at age 2 or 3 begins getting the child in a frame of mind that the dentist office can be a fun place to go. We praise the child's super smile and compliment their teeth and have the child begin thinking about their smile being a positive part of their self-esteem and presentation. Also, at an early age we can have a good idea of how the child's teeth and jaws are going to grow. For some dental bite problems, we actually treat the child at age 4 or 5 so that we can change the growth pattern of the jaw to allow the teeth to come in properly at a later age. Sometimes, treatment now can prevent jaw surgery that may be required if treatment is postponed. Amazingly enough, TMJ, or jaw joint problems, can also be diagnosed and prevented at early ages. If detected early, long years of headaches and pain in the head and neck region can be avoided.

More and more research is showing that the mouth is the window to our body. So early habits of good oral health can lead to good habits and whole body health for a lifetime of comfort and good looks in the growing ages.