

Dental professionals today are well equipped to make a child's dental checkup a pleasant experience. Using a show and

tell approach, they explain what they are doing in words that fit a child's vocabulary, e.g. the x-ray machine is a camera and the drill is a fire engine that whistles and squirts water.

Fear of dental care is not instinctive! Children will not fear dental treatment unless they have had a bad experience or learn it from someone. What parents say and do can help children have a better experience during their first visit. This pamphlet answers some of your questions and provides helpful advice.

### When should my child first see the dentist?

- Ideally a child's first visit should be as early as 1 year-old and not later than two and a half years when all the milk teeth have grown.

### Why start dental visits so early?

There are several good reasons for early dental visits:

- Parents might not recognize early dental problems.
- Early dental visits allow your dentist to prevent problems rather than spend time correcting them.
- If any problems exist, these can be diagnosed early and managed before it gets too complicated.
- Advice on nutrition and home dental care is provided earlier.
- Children start to get cavities as soon as the first teeth emerge. Babies put to bed with a bottle of juice or milk are likely to develop extensive decay.
- Cavities in milk teeth need to be filled to relieve pain and allow the child to eat, talk and smile confidently.
- Children can have developmental dental problems like crooked teeth or a bad bite. The sooner these are discovered, the better the chances of successful treatment.
- It is important that the first dental visit is pleasant, not anxiety-producing. Going to see the dentist only when the child has problems, does not allow this.

### How do I choose a dentist for my child?

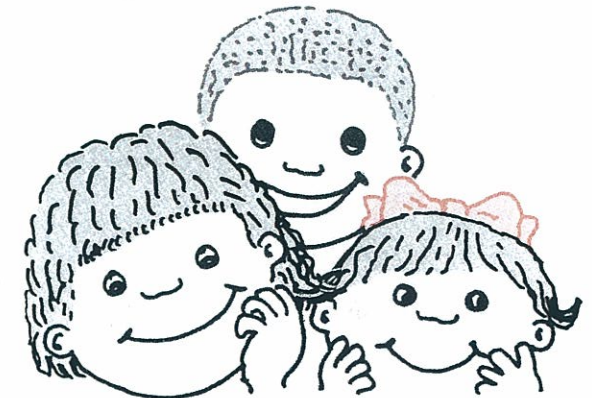
Ask the following questions when choosing a dentist:

- Does the dentist seem interested in prevention?
- Does the dentist recommend sealants (protective coatings applied to the chewing surfaces of back teeth), provide diet and home-care counselling and fluoride treatments?
- If your child has an unusual problem, you may wish to see a paediatric dentist, i.e. someone who has special training in the care of children. Ask your dentist or your paediatrician for recommendations.

### How do I prepare my child for the first visit to the dental surgery?

- Parents play an important part in getting children started with a good attitude towards dental care.

Be completely natural and easygoing when you tell your child about the appointment. Enable your child to view this as an opportunity to meet new people who are interested in him and want to help him stay healthy.



Note the following "dos" and don'ts":

### First Visit "Dos"

- Familiarise your child with the dental office. Take your toddler along when someone else in the family is going for a dental check-up.
- Play "dentist". Count your child's teeth as you shine a light on them. Then switch roles and let your child play dentist.
- Read to your child a book about going to the dentist for the first time, for example "Timmy Visits the Dentist" a colouring book produced by the Singapore Dental Health Foundation.
- Before the appointment, tell the dentist about your child, including any special needs or medical problems like allergies or heart conditions.
- Make the appointment on a day and time when the child is not tired.
- Be low-key. Treat the visit as routine. Answer questions the child poses, honestly but not too specifically.
- Allow plenty of time for getting ready on the day of the appointment so as not to rush the child.
- Let the dentist decide whether you should stay in the room with your child. Some children respond better without their parents present.

### First Visit "Don'ts"

- Don't make the visit the high point of the day. Your child will suspect that something is up.
- Avoid using bribery and threats in an attempt to encourage good behaviour. Especially refrain from threatening the child with a dental visit when he refuses to brush his teeth or misbehaves.
- Try not to be anxious about the visit. Don't communicate your own fears to the child.
- Avoid saying negative words like pain, jab, pull, or drill.
- Don't try to describe exactly what will happen. The dentist has special words and ways to explain the procedures to the child.
- Don't expect perfect behaviour. Your child may be shy or fearful and misbehave. If your child throws a tantrum, be firm. With a child over 3 years old the dentist may want to handle the situation without your presence in the surgery.
- Don't make the dentist the villain. Dental care is something you want for your child.

### General advice to parents.

Regular visits may be required to encourage and reinforce life-long habits which maintain good dental health. Strong teeth, fresh breath and healthy gums can be theirs for life if children are started early with good dental habits and practices.

Your dentist



A Dental Health Education Leaflet by the  
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# Your Child's First Visit To The Dentist

Make it fun!

