



DOWN SYNDROME PROGRAM
www.massgeneral.org/downsyndrome

Preparing for a Dentist Visit

People with Down syndrome sometimes need specialized care for their unique dental needs. This handout will tell you how to prepare for a visit to the dentist, where to find the right dentist and how to care for your teeth at home.

WHY IS DENTAL CARE IMPORTANT FOR ME?

People with Down syndrome need specialized dental care for many reasons. One reason is that they have a higher risk of developing gum disease and cavities. People with Down syndrome usually do not get their first teeth until they're about 1 year old. They might be 4 or 5 years old before they have all of their baby teeth.

People with Down syndrome might also have teeth that look different from other people's teeth. They can have cross bites (where the top teeth lie inside the bottom teeth), open bites (where the top and bottom teeth don't touch), or crowded, missing or extra teeth. They can also have impacted canine teeth, where the canine teeth don't come through the gums. These problems can also cause people with Down syndrome to grind their teeth.

HOW SHOULD I PREPARE FOR A DENTIST VISIT?

To prepare for a dentist visit, you should:

- Talk with your dentist before the visit about any medical conditions, questions or concerns
- Before the visit, ask the dentist if you might need sedation (special medicine to calm your child). Sedation can be light, like a prescription for calming medication, or full, like anesthesia ("going to sleep").
- If you have a heart condition, talk to your doctor about whether you will need to take antibiotics before the visit

WHEN SHOULD I FIND A DENTIST?

You should find a dentist for your son or daughter 6 months after you first tooth comes in OR after he or she is 1 year old, whichever happens first.

WHERE CAN I FIND THE RIGHT DENTIST?

It is important to find the right dentist so that you receive the best dental care possible. Here are some resources where you can find dentists who are specially trained to work with people who have Down syndrome and other special health care needs:

- Massachusetts General Hospital
We have dentists who are specially trained to care for people with Down syndrome. Visit www.massgeneral.org/dental/doctors or call (617)726-1076.
- Special Care Dentistry Association
This organization has special experience working with people with Down syndrome. Visit www.scdaonline.org/?referral.
- Many hospitals have dentists who are trained to work with people who have Down syndrome or other developmental disabilities. Check the hospitals in your community to learn which ones have dentists with special training.

WHAT CAN I DO AT HOME TO KEEP MY SON OR DAUGHTER'S TEETH AND GUMS HEALTHY?

Finding the right dentist is important and will help prevent dental problems in the future. Preventing dental problems from the time you are young is the key to healthy teeth and gums. The type of dental care you need, however, depends on your age.

- If your son or daughter is under 1 year OR does not have teeth yet, you can wipe his or her gums twice a day with a soft, moist cloth.
- If your son or daughter is 2 years old OR has his or her first tooth, brush his or her teeth twice a day with a soft toothbrush and toothpaste with fluoride. The amount of toothpaste should be the size of a grain of rice.
- If your child is between 2-6 years old, brush his or her teeth twice a day with a soft toothbrush and toothpaste with fluoride. The amount of toothpaste should be the size of a pea. Do not rinse his or her mouth after spitting out the toothpaste.
- If your child is 6 years old or older, brush his or her teeth twice a day with a soft toothbrush and toothpaste with fluoride. The amount of toothpaste should be the size of a pea.

I LIKE CERTAIN DENTAL CARE PRODUCTS BETTER THAN OTHERS. WHAT SHOULD I USE?

You might like different dental care products more than others. There are many options for you to choose from. Here are some suggestions for different types of dental care products:

- Use mouthwash with fluoride if he or she doesn't like toothpaste.
- Use a plastic flosser if he or she has trouble using or doesn't like regular floss.
- Use an electric toothbrush instead of a regular toothbrush.

Down Syndrome Program

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For more information please call

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