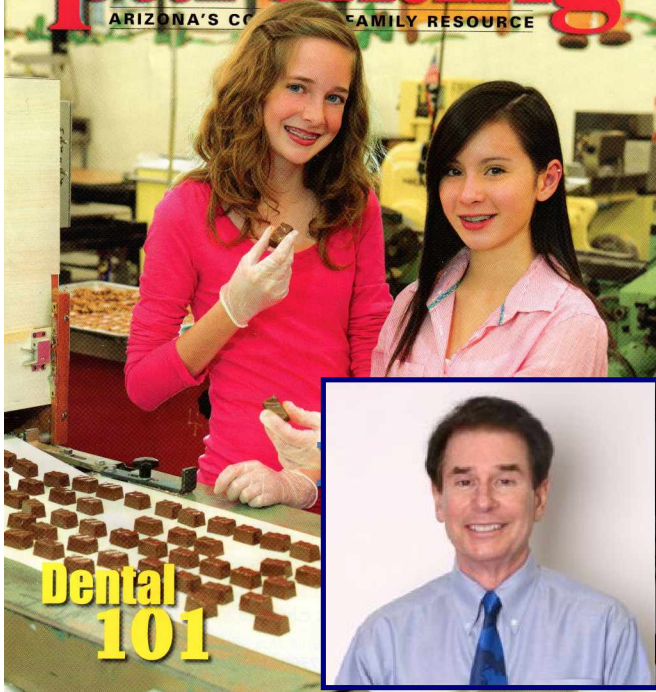




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That First Trip to the Dentist

Learn How to Prepare and Succeed!

by Dr Richard Chaet

When you were a child, your parents probably did not bring you to the dentist until you were three or four years of age (if you were lucky). You may or may not have had cavities. You also may or may not have enjoyed the experience. According to the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, your child's first dental visit should occur around their first birthday. While this may sound unfamiliar or even strange, let's examine the reasons for this recommendation and why your infant will in fact benefit from this early dental visit.

One of the main purposes of bringing an infant or toddler to the dentist is to have a conversation about oral health, learn about dental disease and its preventability, as well as establish a Dental Home! During this interactive discussion,

the dentist will listen to a parent or caregiver's concerns and answer questions. The typical infant visit usually reviews the following information:

- Medical history
- Family dental history & determining cavity risk
- Why baby teeth matter
- How cavities can be prevented
- Oral issues, such as teething
- Feeding practices: breast, bottle, sippy cup
- Oral hygiene techniques
- Fluoride exposure: water, bottles, drops/tablets, toothpaste
- Oral habits: thumbs vs. pacifiers
- Injury prevention & making the home child-safe

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mouth to digest this sugar and produce cavity-causing acid that lasts about 20 minutes. Eating the whole cookie or drinking all the juice (four ounces) at the same time produces the same 20 minute acid attack. However, if the child nibbles the same cookie or sips the four ounces of juice over a period of hours, the bacteria will produce acid continuously for hours instead of 20 minutes. So, eat the whole cookie or drink all the juice in one short period of time. However, water and snacks that don't contain sugar are best for your child!

When choosing a dentist for your child, spend time researching dental offices in the area by asking your pediatrician, family doctor, friends and family for referrals. Consider whether or not you want to bring your child to the family dentist or to a pediatric dentist. If you had great experiences at the family dentist and they are "child friendly," you may want to go there. You should seriously consider a pediatric dentist as they are specialists in treating children. In any case, here are some questions you might ask when you call an office:

- Does the doctor love and welcome young children into their office?

- Does the staff enjoy seeing children in the office and view them as pleasant additions to the daily schedule rather than possible distractions due to their young age?
- Do the doctor and staff have extensive experience guiding children's behavior and treating dental needs if any arise?
- Will the office's physical environment make the child comfortable? Is there a play area with toys and games?
- Can I visit the office and meet the doctor and staff?
- Are parents allowed to stay with their child during the visit?
- Are all procedures and fees clearly explained?
- Will I be given a written estimate of fees and insurance coverage?
- Does the office have a web page?

After choosing a dental office, you should spend time preparing your child for the visit. If you are bringing an infant or very young toddler, there is little preparation. However, if your child is over two years of age, some advance preparation is best. There are many well-written

Once this information has been covered, the doctor will then examine your child and demonstrate various tooth brushing techniques and help find one that works best for you both. You may not have realized it, but you have now established your child's Dental Home. This means that your child's oral health care needs will be taken care of in a comprehensive, continually assessable and coordinated manner. For example, if your two-year-old daughter slips in the tub on a Saturday evening and chips a tooth, you should be able to reach your dentist for advice, or if necessary, visit the office for treatment.

First and foremost, your dentist is trying to help determine your child's risk for getting cavities. For example, if you and your partner have extensive cavity histories, chances are fairly high that your child may, too. You may be able to reduce your child's risk for decay by brushing and using fluoridated toothpaste twice daily. If your child is under the age of two, use a smear of fluoridated toothpaste on the brush, and if over two, a pea size amount.

Another tip to reduce cavities is to limit the frequency of carbohydrates and sugary foods and drinks throughout the day. It is not so much what you eat, but how often you eat, that may cause cavities. For instance, one bite of a cookie or even one sip of fruit juice allows the bacteria in your

books that can help you with your child's first dental visit. If the office you have chosen has a website, this is a good opportunity to share it with your child and get them familiar with the idea of visiting a dentist.

One of the most important things you should do is use positive terms when explaining the visit. Tell your child, "We are going to visit the dentist and they are going to give you a new tooth brush and brush your teeth." They will tell and show you everything in advance so you know how much fun the visit will be. Upon completion, they will give you a special gift to take home. Refrain from using words or expressions like "it won't hurt," "don't be scared," or "you won't get a shot." If the parent or care giver is positive and excited about the visit, chances are good that the child will feel the same way.

By adhering to these early dentist visit recommendations, most children have great first dental experiences and can't wait to return! ■

Dr. Richard Chaet has practiced pediatric dentistry in Scottsdale for over 30 years. He is a Diplomate of the American Board of Pediatric Dentistry, as well as an examiner for that organization. He also is a member of the Council on Clinical Affairs who writes the Policies and Guidelines for the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry.

