



Healthy Smiles Start Early

Oral Care Tips for Your Kiddo

February is **National Children's Dental Health Month**, a perfect reminder that good oral health starts from infancy. Even before your baby's first tooth appears, it's important to establish healthy habits that will set the stage for a lifetime of strong teeth and gums. Here are some essential tips:

Clean Gums Daily. Before teeth emerge, wipe your baby's gums with a **soft, damp cloth** or a baby toothbrush after feedings to remove bacteria and promote oral health.

Start Brushing Early. Once the first tooth appears, use a **soft-bristled toothbrush** and a tiny smear of fluoride toothpaste (about the size of a grain of rice) to gently clean teeth twice a day.



Avoid Bottle Decay. Never put your baby to bed with a bottle of milk, juice, or formula, as prolonged exposure to sugars can lead to early tooth decay, also known as baby bottle **tooth decay**.

Introduce a Cup Around Age One. Encourage your baby to start drinking from a **sippy cup** by their first birthday to reduce prolonged bottle use, which can contribute to dental problems.

Choose Healthy Foods. As your baby starts solid foods, opt for **nutrient-rich options** like dairy, fruits, and vegetables that support healthy teeth and gums while limiting sugary snacks and drinks.

Avoid Sharing Utensils. Bacteria that cause cavities can be passed from parents to babies. **Avoid sharing spoons or cleaning pacifiers with your mouth** to reduce the risk of early cavities.



Schedule a First Dental Visit. The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry recommends that babies visit a dentist by their **first birthday** to ensure proper development and to catch any early concerns.

By prioritizing oral care from the very beginning, you can help your child develop strong, healthy teeth for a lifetime of beautiful smiles. Celebrate National Children's Dental Health Month by taking these small but impactful steps to protect your baby's smile!



StartSmart is designed to share practical tips and advice each month to help you nurture your baby's growth and development. From encouraging milestones to promoting healthy habits, *StartSmart* is here to support you every step of the way on your parenting journey!

Supporting Your Baby's Cognitive Development

Promoting cognitive development in babies involves engaging them in activities that stimulate their senses, encourage problem-solving, and support brain growth. Here are some effective activities:

Sensory Play: Use textured mats during **Tummy Time** to help develop spatial awareness and strengthen muscles, and **touch and feel books** to expose baby to different textures and materials. **Water play**, like pouring, splashing, and scooping improve sensory skills, but *always* supervise your child when they are in or near any amount of water - *no matter how little*.

Talking & Singing: During everyday activities, describe what you're doing to baby, ask them questions, and respond to their babbling.. **Singing** nursery rhymes and songs helps with memory, rhythm, and language development, and **reading books aloud** - even at a young age - enhances vocabulary and listening skills.

Movement-Based Activities: Encourage baby to **reach for toys** to promote hand-eye coordination. **Rolling a ball** supports tracking objects and motor development, and **dancing** with music enhances rhythm and balance.

Problem-Solving Play: Introducing puzzles like basic shape sorters or large-piece puzzles as well as "cause-and-effect" toys like those with buttons that play sounds, pop-up toys, or spinning wheels, can enhance problem-solving.

Object Exploration: Playing **peekaboo** teaches object permanence. Stacking and nesting cups develops problem-solving and fine motor skills. Rattles and soft toys help with grasping, shaking, and auditory processing.

Social Interaction: Mirror play helps baby recognize themselves and develop social awareness. **Playdates or group activities** encourage social and emotional learning.

Outdoor Exploration: Walks in **nature** will introduce your baby to new sights, sounds, and textures. **Point to objects** and name trees, animals, or cars to help expand vocabulary.



Important dates this month:

February 2	Groundhog Day
February 14	Valentine's Day
February 17	Presidents' Day



Follow us on Facebook at
facebook.com/SkylineCAPHealthyFamilies