

Dental Care for Children with Special Needs



Children with special needs may need extra help to have and keep good dental health. Starting dental care when your child is young is an important step for them. Here are some tips to help:

- Set up a calm, safe routine for your child's dental care at home.
- Speak softly and praise your child at each stage of their dental care routine.
- Help your child open their mouth wide and keep it open.
- Get your child used to the toothbrush and floss. Start as early as you can—as soon as teeth appear. Touch the toothbrush to the child's lips, gums and teeth. A Power toothbrush may be too strong and scare your child. So just use a regular toothbrush.
- Brush teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste. Try different toothpastes until you find one your child likes. If the foam from toothpaste bothers your child, choose one that does not have "Sodium Laurel Sulfate." Speak to the dentist about other choices.
- Make a regular time each day for brushing and flossing. Schedule time to see the dentist at least two times a year.
- Limit sugary snacks or drinks. Don't use them as rewards.
- Don't share knives, forks, cups and toothbrushes. This will decrease passing bacteria which can cause tooth decay.
- If you need to use a pacifier, don't dip it in honey or sugar.
- Use open cups and not a sip cup as soon as your child can learn to do so.
- If your child likes to go to bed with a bottle, use plain water only.
- Always use a car seat and seat belt to prevent accidents that could hurt your child's face and teeth.

Children should have their first dental visit 6 months after the first tooth comes in or by one year of age (whichever comes first).

- It's important to have your child become used to dental visits at a young age. Dental office visits should be part of their normal routine and not only for dental emergencies. This will help lower fear linked to dental care.
- When you go to the dentist, ask them how often your child should be seen. Timing could change based on the special needs of your child.
- Before each dental session, let the dental office know if there are any issues that may trigger certain behaviors. They can include smells, sounds, and bright lights.
- The dental office may give you a pre visit questionnaire to get important facts before the visit. This is to help make the visit as comfortable as possible for your child.



Adapted from "Dental Health Guidance for Parents and Caregivers of Children with Special Needs", University of Washington School of Dentistry.

If you need help finding a Denti-Cal dentist, call Molina Member Services or talk about this with your child's PCP.

Do you have questions?

Call our 24-hour Nurse Advice Line.
We are here to help you.



English: (888) 275-8750
Español: (866) 648-3537
TTY/TDD: 711

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To get this information in other languages and accessible formats, please call Member Services. This number is on the back of your Member ID card.

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