

What Can I Do As A Parent?

Dear Dr. McCrummen: What are the most important things I can do for my children's teeth, and what can I do to make their trips to the dentist easier on them, and on my pocketbook? J.S.

First of all, realize that most kids do not understand the real benefit of good oral health, or even care about it. The parents have the responsibility of doing what is necessary for their kid's health and well-being, and manage finances. Kids are told what to do so often that they tend to tune their parents out. Your guidance will usually not be appreciated until later in life. Until they reach an "age of responsibility" parents must help their kids to act responsibly.

Whatever the kids do not do for their oral health will usually affect them adversely at some time, but it especially affects their parents financially while they are dependents. If parents see to it that their kids brush and floss each day, and take them to the dentist regularly to help prevent problems or catch them when they are small, the visits will be more comfortable and at a lower cost. If kids are only given healthy snacks, and can drink better alternatives than sodas, their general and oral health would be better. But, if parents leave it up to the kids to decide what to eat they would likely chose things that are sweeter and lower in nutrients. Kids would very likely chose not to brush, and especially not floss, if it was left up to them. Health responsibility often improves when they pay their own way, but that is often too late, the damage may already have been done, and bad habits have become ingrained.

Children should see their dentist by the age of two and every six months thereafter. This sets the stage for comfortable preventive visits, which is good insurance for better health and lower costs. Parents would pay a much lower cost doing this than paying monthly dental insurance premiums, deductibles, and the portion the insurance company chooses not to cover. Every dental visit should include an examination, cleaning the plaque (bacterial colonies) off of their teeth, a fluoride treatment to harden the teeth, a review of oral hygiene instructions, and x-rays should be taken at least yearly.

All teeth should be checked for decay and sealed. This will help prevent the most common type of decay which occurs in the small grooves on the top of teeth. Candy and sugars get into these areas and feed the bacteria that cause cavities, and the toothbrush bristles are too big to clean them out. Have all grooves cleaned out, disinfected, and sealed off. It is said that *each tooth* that a person can prevent a cavity in will save over a thousand dollars in their lifetime. We usually have 28 to 32 teeth.

Be sure that your kids brush and floss each day for them *and for you*. If they are not doing that simple 6 minute preventive routine each day who will be paying for the cavities caused by the bacteria left on the teeth? The bacteria like it there and they like to be left alone to reproduce, increase populations, and invade the teeth and gums. Don't let them get away with it.

Set a good example by doing the same and treat yourself to simpler and less expensive dental visits. It is really not the dental treatment that costs so much, it is the bacteria and what is not being done to prevent problems that costs so much. Treat you and your family members to good oral health, more pleasant dental visits, and take a trip to Hawaii on your savings.