

Did you know that your oral health, as a parent, can affect whether or not your child will have cavities? This is true. Parents or caregivers could pass on decay-causing germs to their children.

At birth, babies do not have decay-causing germs in their mouths. These germs are passed from parents or caregivers to babies through day to day activities such as kissing and sharing utensils such as spoons. The more germs parents have in their mouths, the more germs will be passed to the baby. This can increase the risk of a disease called Early Childhood Tooth Decay (ECTD). ECTD is tooth decay that affects the teeth of babies and young children.

## What Causes Tooth Decay?

Tooth decay is caused by plaque. Plaque is a layer of sticky, invisible germs that stick to the teeth, gums and tongue. It is constantly growing in your mouth. Plaque causes cavities, gum disease and bad breath.

Tooth decay begins when plaque sticks to the tooth and makes acids from the carbohydrates (sugars and starches) in foods. If plaque is not removed every day by flossing and brushing, it builds up and causes gums to become sore and bleed easily. Bleeding is a common early sign of gum disease and means that brushing and flossing practices need to be improved.

## How Can I Help My Child to be Cavity-Free?

Your child can have good oral health. Parents can help by keeping their own mouth healthy. Parents and caregivers can reduce the number of germs in their mouth. This can be done by:

- **Flossing every day.** Flossing cleans between teeth and under gums where a toothbrush cannot. You can choose floss that is waxed, unwaxed or flavoured. Flossing is important to prevent tooth decay and gum disease. If gum disease is ignored, it may lead to an increased risk of other diseases like heart disease, stroke, pneumonia, or the birth of a pre-term low birth weight baby.

## How to Floss



Wrap floss around middle fingers (about half a meter or half an arm's length)



Gently guide floss between teeth



Move floss up and down, sliding under gumline, on both adjacent teeth

*(turn over)*



Accountable



Collaborative



Common Goals



Dedicated



Evidence-Based Practice



Wellbeing

- **Brushing for two - three minutes, twice a day**, in the morning and at night. Use fluoride toothpaste approved by the Canadian Dental Association. Use a soft-bristled toothbrush and replace the brush when the bristles become bent or frayed (about every 3 months) or after an illness. **Never share toothbrushes**. This prevents the spread of decay-causing germs.

### How to Brush

Angle the toothbrush bristles towards your gums. Gently brush back and forth with short, vibrating motions on 2 or 3 teeth at a time. Repeat until all areas are clean.

Outside



Inside



Top of the teeth



- **Keeping your mouth disease free**. Visit the dentist regularly to have cavities repaired, broken fillings replaced, and gum conditions treated. When your mouth is disease free, the transmission of the decay-causing germs from you to your child is reduced.
- **Eating a balanced diet** for good general health. Check the [Eat Well. Live Well with Canada's Food Guide](#) for more information. Many foods contain sugars and starches that allow the germs in plaque to make decay causing acids. Limit the number of times you snack between meals. Foods or treats high in sugar should be eaten immediately following or with a meal.

Children model what they see their parents doing. The best way to encourage them to brush and floss is to be a good role model yourself. This helps to ensure good dental habits for a lifetime.

**The health of your child's mouth depends on you!**

For more information check the website at [www.saskohc.ca](http://www.saskohc.ca)