

## Laying the Roots for Healthy Teeth in Young Children

*VOA Special English (voaspecialenglish.com) is Voice of America's daily news and information service for English learners. Read the story and then do the activities at the end.*

This is the VOA Special English Health Report.

Bad teeth can be painful -- and worse. They can even be deadly. Infections of the gums and teeth can release bacteria into the blood system. Those bacteria can increase the chances of a heart attack or stroke and worsen the effects of other diseases. And adults are not the only ones at risk.

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For example, in two thousand seven, doctors in the Washington area said a boy died when a tooth infection spread to his brain. They said it might have been prevented had he received the dental care he needed. He was twelve years old.

Experts at the National Institutes of Health say good dental care starts at birth. Breast milk, they say, is the best food for the healthy development of teeth. Breast milk can help slow bacterial growth and acid production in the mouth.



But dentists say a baby's gums and early teeth should be cleaned after each feeding. Use a cloth with a little warm water. Do the same if a baby is fed with a bottle. Experts say if you decide to put your baby to sleep with a bottle, only give the child water.

When baby teeth begin to appear, you can clean them with a wet toothbrush. Dentists say it is important to find soft toothbrushes made especially for babies and to use them very gently.

The use of fluoride to protect teeth is common in many parts of the world. For example, it is often added to drinking water supplies. The fluoride mixes with enamel, the hard surface on teeth, to help prevent holes, or cavities, from forming.

But young children often swallow toothpaste when they brush. The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry notes that swallowing fluoridated toothpaste can cause problems. So young children should be carefully supervised when they brush their teeth. And only a small amount of fluoridated toothpaste, the size of a pea, should be used.

Parents often wonder what effect thumb sucking or sucking on a pacifier might have on their baby's teeth. Dental experts generally agree that this is fine early in life.

The American Academy of Family Physicians says most children stop sucking their thumb by the age of four. If it continues, the group advises parents to talk to their child's dentist or doctor. It could interfere with the correct development of permanent teeth.

Dentists say children should have their first dental visit at least by the time they are one year old. They say babies should be examined when their first teeth appear -- usually at around six months.

*Now do the worksheet ...*

**Level: beginner - intermediate**

**Time: 20 -30 minutes**

**This worksheet will help you learn new vocabulary about teeth. You will answer questions about healthy teeth, and write a short paragraph about dentist recommendations in your country.**

1. Write the word from the word box next to its definition below.

bacteria	fluoride	gums	infection
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a. the flesh that surrounds the roots of your teeth  
\_\_\_\_\_

b. very small living things that often cause disease  
\_\_\_\_\_

c. disease caused by germs that enter the body  
\_\_\_\_\_

d. chemical that can be added to drinking water and toothpaste to help keep teeth healthy \_\_\_\_\_

2. Match the words on the left with the words on the right to make four phrases. Write the phrase on the line. The phrases are in the article.

a. blood	1. risk	_____
b. at	2. development	_____
c. healthy	3. toothpaste	_____
d. fluoridated	4. system	_____

3. What does *healthy* mean?

- not sick
- a little bit sick
- very sick

4. Look again at the title of the article: *Laying the Roots for Healthy Teeth in Young Children*. What is the article about?

- planting children's teeth in the ground
- teaching children to take care of their teeth

5. Read the sentence below. Is it *true* or *false*? If it is false, correct the sentence.

You should always take care of your teeth.

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6. What did experts at the National Institutes of Health say about breast milk?

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7. What do dentists say about babies? Check the correct answers.

- It's not necessary to clean their gums and early teeth every day.
- Gums and early teeth should be cleaned after each feeding.
- Use a cloth with a little warm water to clean babies' gums and early teeth.
- Only give young children water at bedtime.

8. How does fluoride help keep teeth healthy?

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9. Why should parents supervise children when they brush their teeth?

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10. Complete the following sentence with a number to make it true.

Dentists say children should have their first dental visit at least by the time they are \_\_\_\_\_ year old.

### OVER TO YOU

What do dentists in your country recommend for healthy teeth? Why do you think you should go to the dentist at an early age?

Write 5-8 sentences explaining your answer.

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## ANSWER KEY

1. gums, bacteria, infection, fluoride
2. blood system, at risk, healthy development, fluoridated toothpaste
3. not sick
4. teaching children to take care of their teeth
5. true
6. Breast milk is the best food for the healthy development of teeth.
7. Gums and early teeth should be cleaned after each feeding.; Use a cloth with a little warm water to clean babies' gums and early teeth.; Only give young children water at bedtime.
8. Fluoride mixes with enamel, the hard surface on teeth, to help prevent holes, or cavities, from forming.
9. The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry says that swallowing fluoridated toothpaste can cause problems.
10. one