

# Taking care of your child's teeth: An age-by-age guide

By Meagan Ruffing

February is National Dental Hygiene month which means it's a great time to get your kids on board with learning how to brush their teeth and actually enjoying it. No more battling your kids to take responsibility for cleaning their teeth or going back and "doing it again." These insider tips from a mom who has been there and done that will have you feeling prepared to tackle the tricky life-lesson of teaching your children how to take care of their teeth.

## Ages 0-2

It's never too early to start cleaning the inside of your child's mouth. For this age, when your child has not yet sprouted his first tooth use a damp washcloth to wipe his gums down after nursing or bottle-feeding. If your child has a few teeth, use a finger brush with a tiny amount (the size of the tip of a pencil) of fluoride-free toothpaste and do it yourself. Getting your children in the habit of cleaning their mouths is a great way to get them prepared for their very first visit to the dentist.

Around age two is when your dentist will recommend doing a "Lap" exam for their first dental visit. This just means the child sits in your lap (facing you) and lays back with her head on your knees. The dentist goes knee-to-knee with the parent while looking at the inside of your daughter's mouth. The exam is usually just a few minutes long and the dentist is checking for any signs of decay.



## Ages 3+

By now, your child should be seeing a dentist and brushing his own teeth with adult supervision. Buying a toothbrush with a smaller, softer head will ensure your child has the best toothbrush for his mouth. For the younger ages (3-5), using a pea-sized amount of toothpaste with fluoride in it will ensure your child is getting the protection he needs to keep his tooth enamel strong. To make the actual process of tooth brushing more fun, humming

the "Happy Birthday" song is a great way to get your child involved in the process. Doing this serves two purposes: 1.) Making sure your son is brushing his teeth long enough and, 2.) Keeping him engaged long enough to keep the toothbrush in his mouth. No promises that he won't smile and laugh while doing this but that's part of the fun.

## Flossing & Brushing

Your child should be seeing the dentist every six months for regular check-ups once they turn three. Flossing is encouraged even at this young age especially when kids are learning to do some basic tasks for themselves. Buying the kid-friendly floss sticks is much easier than trying to use the floss adults use. You can get all sorts of fun floss sticks that are colored, flavored and even character-shaped to help encourage flossing.

If you see that your child is having a hard time with wanting to brush her teeth or brush them long enough to actually make a difference, try brushing your teeth with her. Grab your toothbrush and do it together. Kids are more likely to try new things and be encouraged to brush their teeth when they see that mom and dad do it too. Have a brush-your-teeth-a-thon and see who can brush the longest.

There will still be some children who just don't want to brush their teeth. Try taking them to the store and letting them pick out their own toothbrush. Sometimes taking

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January is  
**ALZHEIMER**  
Awareness Month

## The stages of Alzheimer's disease

Alzheimer's disease affects over half a million Canadians, and in less than 15 years, that number is expected to double. In honour of Alzheimer's Awareness Month, here's what you should know about this fatal disease and how it progresses.

### EARLY STAGE

Initially, the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease are mild and may include forgetfulness, trouble communicating and changes in behaviour and temperament. At this stage, afflicted individuals only require minimal help and are often capable of providing insight into their condition, thereby allowing them to plan their future care.

### MIDDLE STAGE

People at this stage may still be aware of their condition, but the impairments to their memory, cognition and ability to communicate and function are significant. These individuals usually require help with daily tasks such as meal preparation, shopping, housekeeping, bathing and getting dressed. At this point, caregivers should consider seeking

support for themselves, as the emotional and physical toll can become difficult to bear.

### LATE STAGE

Also called "severe" or "advanced," this stage of the Alzheimer's disease comes with a complete inability to communicate and a need for 24-hour care. Efforts are focused on keeping the person comfortable and maintaining as high a quality of life as possible.

### END OF LIFE STAGE

Alzheimer's disease will eventually lead to death. In the final months of life, care for Alzheimer's patients is the same as for those with any terminal illness. The focus is on physical, emotional and spiritual comfort.

For more information about Alzheimer's disease including warning signs, fact sheets about the various stages of the disease and resources for caregivers and patients, visit the Alzheimer Society of Canada's website at [alzheimer.ca](http://alzheimer.ca).

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