

All parents wish that their children could have good oral health. However, our children with special needs often have difficulties in taking care of their own teeth, and they have a higher chance of tooth decay and gum disease. Therefore, they need our guidance to help them establish a healthy lifestyle and acquire good oral care habits.

I have encountered a lot of difficulties in the past and I wish to share my experience with you in this booklet.

Q1. It worries me when my child swallows the toothpaste, therefore, I don't allow him to use toothpaste while brushing his teeth.

Q2. What should I do if my child doesn't know how to spit out water and have difficulties in rinsing after brushing his teeth?

Q3. What kind of toothbrush is suitable for my seven-year-old son?

Q4. My child is impatient with toothbrushing, what should I do?

Q5. My daughter refuses to brush her teeth, how can I change her?

Q6. My daughter always bites on the toothbrush and she cannot open her mouth properly for toothbrushing.

Q7. How can I help my child brush his teeth since he always sticks out his tongue involuntarily?

Q8. What should I do to help my child brush if he easily gags while brushing?

Q9. I use toothpick to remove the food debris stuck in between my child's teeth, will that widen the space between his teeth?

Q10. It is difficulty to pass the dental floss in between two teeth to floss.

Q11. My daughter's head is always moving involuntarily while I am cleaning her teeth.

Q12. I have encountered difficulties in cleaning my daughter's teeth because her teeth are crooked.

Q13. Why is it that my son still has decayed teeth and even dental abscess despite he brushes his teeth twice a day?

A1. The dentist told me that every time we brush our teeth, a pea-size amount of toothpaste is enough. Even if your child accidentally swallows a small amount of toothpaste, it will do no harm to his/her general health. Since Fluoride can effectively prevent tooth decay, it is necessary for children to use fluoridated toothpaste to brush their teeth in the morning and before bed at night.

If you worry about the concentration of fluoride in the adult toothpaste, you can let him use children's toothpaste with only half the adult concentration.

A2. My child also had similar problem in the past. I'm glad that I didn't give up. Eventually, I came up with a solution to solve the problem and helped my child rinse out the excess toothpaste. The solution is:

- Let him wear an apron before toothbrushing to avoid soiling his clothes.
- Prepare a glass of drinking water for rinsing.
- Ask him to open his mouth when he needs to rinse and slowly pour the drinking water into his mouth.
- Allow the water to flow out naturally with the excess toothpaste.
- I often encourage him to play blowing a table tennis ball or strips of paper in order to train him to spit water out. You can also train your child to rinse using games. I believe that if you don't quit, your child will learn to rinse and brush his teeth sooner or later.

A3. My experience is that as long as the bristles are soft, and the size of the toothbrush head is appropriate, you might choose any toothbrush. Since your son is seven-year-old, you may choose a toothbrush with a head size smaller than the diameter of a 50 cents coin. In fact, my dentist told me that to properly clean the teeth, a correct toothbrushing method is most important. You may stand behind your child with him facing a mirror, use one of your hands to gently support his

lower jaw, and use the other hand to hold his hand and teach him brush at the same time. This allows both of you to observe the toothbrushing clearly in the mirror.

The dentist also reminded me to pay attention to three aspects:

The toothbrush bristles should be placed at the gum margin at an angle.

The teeth should be brushed with a maximum of three teeth as a group and each group brushed with a gentle, to-and-fro motion for at least three times.

Every tooth surface should be brushed, including the outer surfaces, the inner surfaces and the chewing surfaces. You may consider this method when you teach your child how to brush. Since the learning ability of each child is different, you should establish a set of procedures to teach your child according to his abilities. You can spend more time with him on difficult areas and provide him with continuous help according to his progress. A consistent teaching approach with steps and procedures can facilitate the child to grasp quickly and master the technique.

A4. My child often has this problem, too! I would first find out the reason why he becomes impatient, whether it is because he wants to watch TV or play. If it is the reason, you may let your child select his favorite toothbrushing time. I tried to allow him brush after playing, he was much more patient then. I praised him as soon as he made it. Consequently, he was more focused in toothbrushing next time.

In addition, I would reduce his trouble of opening and closing his mouth frequently. I will start brushing his teeth from the outer surfaces. When he open his mouth, the chewing surfaces and the inner surface of the upper teeth, and finally the inner surfaces of the lower teeth.

A5. I understand that this is a difficult problem to solve. Try to be patient and find out the reasons why she is not willing to brush, and then try to find a solution. If she rejects the flavour of the toothpaste, then change the flavour. Allow her to choose her own toothbrush and toothpaste to raise her interest in toothbrushing.

If she is feeling too tired at night and does not wish to brush her teeth, I will let her brush her teeth earlier in the evening and that will improve the situation. In this case,

I would immediately praise her for listening to me, for having her teeth cleaned and how these have made me happy. This would effectively motivate her to brush her teeth. When I brush my teeth, I would set a good example and let her watch me brush. Sometimes, I would brush my teeth with her. That way, toothbrushing becomes an interesting parent-child activity.

- A6. Many parents have encountered this discouraging problem, but we still have ways to overcome this. I would wrap a small hand towel to wrap around a pair of wooden chopsticks, fasten it with elastic bands, and allow my child to bite on it on one side of the jaw while I place a toothbrush into the other side to brush the teeth.
- A7. My child would also do this while I brush her teeth, too. In order to let her relax, I would tell her stories, sing a song or play some music. Once her tongue is relaxed, I'll quickly put the toothbrush into her mouth.

I also tried using an electric toothbrush to speed up the toothbrushing process for her as the toothbrush rotates at a very high speed.. However, care must be taken to avoid traumatising to her teeth and gums.

- A8. In such a situation, not only do you feel annoyed, your child feels very uncomfortable too. You should try to reassure and comfort him, so that he will not reject tooth brushing. You may also use a toothbrush with a smaller head size and speed up the brushing process. When you brush the back teeth, avoid pushing the toothbrush too far back.

Sensitive areas should be brushed last. Give him a break whenever he feels uncomfortable before you continue to brush for him. Although it may take longer to finish the toothbrushing, you should still try to teach him patiently.

- A9. I fully understand your worry. In fact, toothpicks can neither completely remove food debris nor remove dental plaque on the adjacent tooth surfaces. Therefore, toothpicks are not very useful. On the other hand, dental floss can effectively clean the adjacent tooth surfaces. I use dental floss daily in order to thoroughly clean my daughter's teeth to remove the dental plaque at the adjacent tooth surfaces.

At first, I tried to use my fingers to control the floss and clean my daughter's teeth but found it very difficult. Afterwards, I learnt to use a dental floss holder from my

dentist and I found it much easier to work in her mouth. I also find flossing the upper teeth is more difficult. I will ask my daughter to slightly tilt his head backwards while I am doing that.

Besides, the dentist reminded me to stand behind my daughter so that both of us are facing the mirror and attend to the following points:

1. Use a back and forth motion, carefully slide the dental floss into the space in between the teeth.
2. After the floss is passed into the space between two teeth, hold the dental floss tightly against one of the adjacent tooth surfaces.
3. Starting from the lowest point at the gum margin, wipe the dental floss up and down against the adjacent tooth surface a few times to clean that surface.
4. Hold the floss tightly against the other adjacent tooth surface in the same space between the teeth.
5. Similarly, starting from the lowest point at the gum margin. Clean the other adjacent tooth surface with up & down motions.

Once your child does not need your help and can brush his teeth independantly. Besides, he is used with you cleaning his adjacent tooth surfaces with a dental floss holder. Then. You may start teaching him floss. Mastering the flossing technique is not easy and will take a long time. Therefore, you should be patient, and take him through step by step. Repeat every step and procedure so that your child can easily grasp and master the skill.

A10. To help your child floss his teeth is difficult, and I can understand how frustrating it could be. However, a dentist can help you. Every year, I bring my child for a regular dental check-up in order to let me understand his oral health condition. I have encountered a similar problem as yours. My dentist told me that my son had calculus collected in between his teeth which made it very difficult for the dental floss to slide down the space between them. After the dentist removed all the calculus from his teeth, the problem was solved. He also showed me how to improve my teeth-cleaning skill. I suggest you should bring your child for an

annual dental check-up too.

You may worry that your child will refuse treatment. In fact, it is simpler and requires less treatment time if dental problems are detected and treated earlier. It will be easier for your child to accept.

- A11. I believe that your daughter is willing to brush her teeth. You may try standing behind her, one arm going round her head with the hand supporting her chin to fix her head. Remember to be patient and only try when your daughter is willing to cooperate. Otherwise, she will reject toothbrushing and flossing. Each time she gets some achievement, she should be praise her for having good control and keeping her head still. You will find that she will do better next time with more praises and awards.
- A12. It is rather easy to solve this problem. You can choose a toothbrush with a smaller head size to brush for her. Your toothbrushing time will be longer. You just need carefully and patiently clean all her teeth one by one.
- A13. I used to have the same misunderstanding that dental caries can be prevented merely with the use of fluoride toothpaste. That fact is that we should also control our frequency of dietary intake. Whenever we eat or drink, the bacteria on the tooth surfaces will metabolize the sugar or starch from the food and produce acid. It is the acid which causes the loss of minerals from the teeth and thus dental decay.

Therefore, each time we eat or drink, there is a chance of developing dental caries. The best way to minimize the chance of having dental decay is to reduce the frequency of dietary intake. You should give your child three full regular meals each day so that he will not be hungry in between meals. If he is hungry, only give him/her one snack in-between two meals. If he wants to eat snacks, let him take the snack immediately after the regular meals. This could fulfill his desire for snacks without increasing the chance of tooth decay. If he is thirsty, you should only give him drinking water to quench thirst.

I do not use food as a gift to award to my child. You may wish to use toys or stationeries, play some games with your child or set up an award scheme at home. If he could reach a certain achievement level, he will be get a bonus gift, etc.