

# tooth care, by the ages

October is National Dental Hygiene Month, making it the perfect time to brush up your family's oral routine, the natural way. by [Marygrace Taylor](#)



## BABIES

**The problem:** 97 percent of parents don't know that their babies should see a dentist by age 1, reports the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry. As a result, many babies are at risk of developing tooth decay and gum disease.

**The solution:** Your little one should see a dentist within six months of getting her first tooth or by her first birthday. "The dentist will examine the gums and teeth, and will also show parents the proper oral care techniques for their baby," says Cindy Flanagan, doctor of dental surgery and a spokesperson for the Academy of General Dentistry. If your child already has a few teeth and hasn't yet seen a dentist, make an appointment. Also, be sure to keep up on her biannual checkups.

**Natural booster:** Toothpaste isn't recommended for babies under age 2 (they can't spit yet), so clean your baby's mouth—even before teeth arrive—by wiping her gums with a damp cloth after she eats.

## LITTLE KIDS

**The problem:** The combination of fluoridated water, fluoridated toothpaste, and fluoridated mouthwash can expose children to (surprise!) too-high levels of fluoride. In fact, 40 percent of U.S. kids develop some form of dental fluorosis, a condition marked by permanent white or

brown streaks on the teeth, says a University of Iowa College of Dentistry study.

**The solution:** Find out the fluoride level in your water from your dentist or local water supplier, says Flanagan. If it exceeds the American Dental Association's recommended ratio of two parts per million, consider using purified or distilled water. The risk of fluorosis occurs while your child's teeth are forming, so avoid toothpaste at least until his permanent teeth start coming in.

**Natural booster:** Have him brush with fluoride-free toothpaste, like Tom's of Maine's Children's Fluoride-Free Toothpaste. (\$4 for 4 ounces, [tomsofmaine.com](#))

## BIG KIDS

**The problem:** The number of children with primary (baby) tooth decay is rising, according to the National Institute of Health, due to kids eating and drinking more sugary foods and beverages than ever. And it's not just the primary teeth at risk—decay can travel down to the permanent teeth waiting beneath the gums.

**The solution:** "One of the most important habits your child can develop is regularly brushing and flossing," says Fred Pockrass, an integrative dentist, cofounder of the Eco-Dentistry Association, and owner of Transcendentist, the first green

dental office in the U.S. Make flossing part of your child's regular routine. Instead of doing it at bedtime—when she's tired and likely to skimp on the job—have her brush and floss her teeth right after dinner.

**Natural booster:** Trade in nylon floss (it sits in landfills for years) for an earth-friendly variety, like RADIUS Organic Silk Floss, which will biodegrade within 90 days. (\$3, [radiustoothbrush.com](#))

## PRETEENS

**The problem:** Having a mouthful of metal isn't just an aesthetic annoyance for kids—sharp brackets on braces often cut the insides of their cheeks, too. Everyday bacteria in the mouth can get into those little cuts, resulting in canker sores.

**The solution:** Check the ingredients in your kid's toothpaste. Sodium laryl sulfate (SLS), the foaming agent in most conventional kinds, can wear down mouth tissue and make it more easily abraded.

**Natural booster:** Provide your braces-wearer with a natural SLS-free toothpaste to keep her mouth more resistant to cuts from the braces. If she does get a canker sore, treat it with Canker Cover, a natural, dissolvable gel patch that goes over the sore. (\$10 for a box of six, [cankercover.com](#))