

dental
health



for children with heart conditions

dental diseases in children with heart conditions

Tooth decay (dental caries) and gum disease (periodontal disease) are the most common oral diseases. Tooth decay and its complications, eg. tooth ache and abscess are still a major health problem for children. Gum disease can begin in childhood as gingivitis. Children with heart conditions have the same risk of having dental diseases as other children. The risk may be increased if the child's teeth have anatomical defects or are exposed to a lot of medication containing sugar.



why is oral health important to my child?

Conditions such as tooth abscess and gum infection can cause 'bacteraemia' which is a shower of bacteria entering the blood stream. Infection of the heart (valve tissue or other structures), called 'Infective Endocarditis', can occur when such bacteria get through the heart lining (called Endocardium) and infect the heart tissue itself.



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why may this happen in a child with a heart abnormality/defect?

In many children with Congenital Heart Defects (and in some with other types of heart disease) the smooth lining of the heart (Endocardium) may be abnormally thin or roughened in places and bacteria can adhere to it, or 'break through', causing infection.

what is 'Infective Endocarditis'?

Infective Endocarditis is a serious medical problem which requires hospitalisation and extensive treatment with antibiotics. It results from infection, usually by bacteria, of part of the heart (often a heart valve). Children with certain structural defects (repaired and unrepaired) of their heart are considered 'at risk' of developing 'Infective Endocarditis'. The risk for children with heart conditions of developing Endocarditis is generally less than 20% (1 in 5) over an entire lifetime. Taking appropriate precautions for those procedures thought to cause a 'bacteraemia' can reduce this further.

my child is taking medicine

It is important to inform your dentist about your child's heart condition and any medications taken because certain drugs, eg. aspirin and warfarin may complicate dental treatment. It is advisable to check with your cardiologist about the necessity of antibiotic cover and modification of medications before any dental procedure. However, dental treatment is safe with the appropriate precautions.



should my child have dental treatment?

Regular dental visits starting before 12 months of age are important for prevention, early diagnosis and treatment of dental diseases. If dental disease is diagnosed, it should be treated as soon as possible.

Some dental procedures can cause gum bleeding, eg. cleaning of teeth where gums are inflamed, deep fillings and tooth extractions; such procedures may cause 'bacteraemia'.

Antibiotic cover must be given just before the treatment is commenced.

Dental procedures that are unlikely to cause 'bacteraemia' are simple restorations, fissure sealants and cleaning procedures that do not cause gingival bleeding. These procedures may not require antibiotic cover (your dentist will advise).



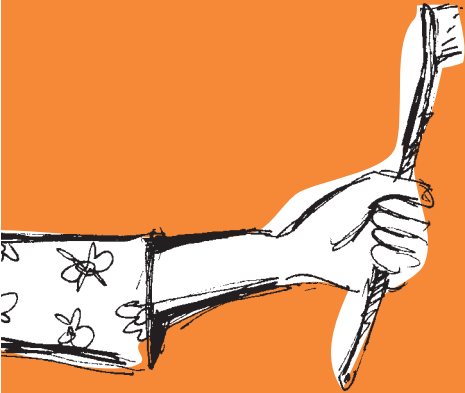
5 keys to prevent dental disease

1. Plaque control

Brushing and flossing is still the most effective way to remove plaque (which causes gingivitis) and to improve gum health.

2. Good feeding practices

Good feeding habits should be developed from birth. With young children, prolonged use of a nursing bottle, especially night bottle, may cause severe tooth decay called nursing bottle caries. Drinking from a cup by 12 months of age is strongly recommended. With older children, a diet with adequate fibre and less sugar will decrease the acid attacks (which cause decay) to the teeth. Ask your friends and relatives not to give sweets and biscuits to your children as rewards.



3. Topical fluoride

Topical fluoride is available in many forms. Fluoride toothpaste is the most widely used and cheapest form. Topical fluoride gels, mouth rinses, fluoride tablets and drops are available commercially but professional advice should be obtained before using these products.

4. Sugar-free medications

Medications that treat your child's heart conditions should not be changed without consulting your physician and cardiologist. However, they will give you advice and possible alternatives including sugar-free medications. The teeth should be carefully cleaned after all liquid medications.



5. Fissure sealants

Fissure sealants are plastic coatings applied on the fissures of a tooth (where most decay starts) to prevent decay. The procedure is quick and simple. No injection or unpleasant treatment is involved. The application of fissure sealants, together with good diet and the use of topical fluoride, can almost prevent all tooth decay.

dental disease is preventable

Further information and advice can be obtained from
the Department of Dentistry, Royal Children's Hospital,
Parkville, 3052. **Telephone (03) 9345-5344.**

every child deserves to smile with healthy teeth



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