

# preventive measures



ANSWERS TO YOUR DENTAL HEALTH QUESTIONS  
BY FAMILY DENTIST CATRISE AUSTIN, D.D.S.

**Q:** My 5-year-old daughter hasn't even lost a baby tooth, but my dentist wants her to see an orthodontist. Can children this young really get braces?

**A:** By looking at X-rays of your daughter's teeth or by performing a clinical exam your dentist may have discovered that perhaps her jaws are not developing at the desired rate to accommodate the permanent teeth that may be waiting to come in. Your daughter should start losing her lower front baby teeth within the next year (by age 6). Perhaps your dentist is foreseeing a potential problem and wants to have the orthodontist step in for a consultation on a potential development problem where her teeth may be crowded if early intervention doesn't occur. There are some cases where children actually do have to wear braces or have teeth extracted along with space maintainer appliances at a young age to allow a more harmonious eruption of permanent teeth. If you have any doubts about your dentist's recommendation, consider getting a second opinion.

**Q:** Could you tell me what to look for in a good toothbrush and how often one needs to be replaced?

**A:** When selecting a toothbrush, select a soft-bristled one. The plaque that accumulates on your

teeth daily is soft, therefore soft-bristled brushes are adequate for cleaning your teeth. Hard and medium brushes may remove the enamel from your teeth, which causes tooth sensitivity.

Next, look at the design of the toothbrush. Choose a brush that will allow easy manipulation. Children's toothbrushes will likely have the recommended age for usage on the package to help parents choose the proper brush.

Consider the size/shape of the toothbrush head. Electric toothbrushes have small, round heads that are great for hard-to-reach areas like wisdom teeth or people who have small mouths, including children.

The standard frequency for changing your toothbrush is every three months or when the bristles of the brush appear worn. Your toothbrush accumulates bacteria daily. Dentists recommend buying a toothbrush sterilizer or running your toothbrushes in the dishwasher on a regular basis to keep them clean between your three-month changes.

**Q:** My son has a brownish spot on one of his molars. I'd like to prepare him for what might happen if this is a cavity. What can we expect?

**A:** You are doing the best thing by preparing him in advance for

his upcoming visit. The dentist will determine if it is indeed a cavity by taking an X-ray or "picture" of the tooth and by using an instrument to touch the tooth to see if the spot is sticky. If the spot is sticky upon touch, this is an indication that the spot is indeed a cavity and needs repair. If the spot is hard upon touch and there is no evidence of a cavity on the X-ray, then the spot is just a discoloration and does not need treatment unless you want it eliminated for cosmetic purposes.

If your son does have a cavity, explain to him that a cavity is when tiny bugs (plaque) mixed with sugar eat a small hole in the tooth. Explain that the dentist will be cleaning out the bugs from the tooth that caused the brown spot. The dentist will repair the cavity first by "putting the tooth to sleep" with "sleepy juice" so that your son can't feel the dentist removing the bugs with the "water drill." Once all the bugs are removed, the dentist will be covering the hole with a white material that looks like a tooth. When the dentist is done, the tooth will be healthy again.

It's very important that you remain calm and maintain a positive attitude. Make sure that you continue to take your son for dental checkups and cleanings every six months.