



Children: 'Take care of your teeth'

Dr. Jen Wolfe of Altoona Pediatric Dental teaches kids the importance of dental health

By ADAM WILSON
Herald-Index editor

There's more to baby teeth than an eventual prize from the tooth fairy.

Baby teeth - also known as primary teeth - are lost and replaced early in life, but are just as important as permanent teeth, helping children learn to chew and how to speak. Baby teeth also hold space in the jaws for permanent teeth that are developing under the gums.

"If a baby tooth is lost prematurely, the baby teeth and the incoming permanent teeth can actually shift around and the permanent tooth that wants to come in can be blocked out," said Dr. Jen Wolfe of Altoona Pediatric Dental.

In recognition of National Children's Dental Health Month, Wolfe is hosting office tours throughout February to introduce local children and their parents to the importance of good oral health and what to expect during office visits.

"We really push prevention, and I think that's what this month is for - awareness and prevention," Wolfe said. *"People need to know that it is important to take your child to the dentist and that baby teeth really are important."*

According to the ADA, the annual observance of children's dental health began as a one-day event in Cleveland, Ohio on Feb. 3, 1941. During that year, Feb. 3-7 was designated as Children's Dental Health Week in Akron, Ohio.

The ADA held the first national observance of Children's Dental Health Day on Feb. 8, 1949. This single day observance became a weeklong event in 1955. In 1981, the program was extended to a month-long celebration known today as National Children's Dental Health Month. Since 1941, the observance has grown from a two-city event into a nationwide program that has taught millions of children the importance of dental health.

Wolfe quotes a 2001 study by the ADA that says tooth decay is five times more common than asthma and seven times more common than hay fever in childhood.

"There's really been an increase in childhood cavities, and I think a lot of that has to do with a sappy cup full of juice," she said. "Everybody thinks juice is this healthy beverage, but it has a really high sugar content, a high acid content.

"Only four ounces of juice is all we need in a day. Juice just covers teeth in sugar and acid."

Instead of juice, Wolfe recommends water and drinks such as sugar free Kool-Aid and Crystal Light, which still have acid, but not the sugar.

"The other thing I tell parents is that when they're in the candy aisle and the kids have done a good job at the store and it's time to pick them a treat, go for the sugar free gum," she said. "Gum is wonderful because chewing actually stimulates saliva, which washes out our mouths. And kids like gum, so it's a good treat."

The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry says that a child should visit a pediatric dentist when the first tooth comes in, usually between six months and 1 year of age.

"Your first visit by your first birthday," Wolfe said. "That way we can stress prevention and that will also give a child a 'dental home.'"

Wolfe also said age 1 is the right time to start teaching your child to brush his or her teeth.

"Sometimes washcloths are suggested, but a toothbrush is better," she said. "At some point and time you're going to have to switch to a toothbrush, so if you just start the kids with one they'll be used to it."

Keep up to date with Dr. Jen and the Altoona Pediatric Dental online at www.altoonapediatricdental.com.

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