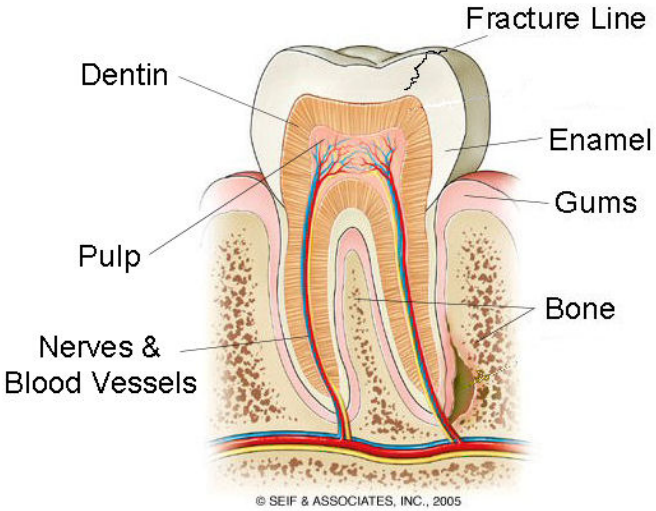
Dental Caries

Dental caries (tooth decay) is the most common of all oral diseases. It is particularly important to deal with it from your child's 1st to 12th year of life. In these years, the baby teeth erupt and are replaced by the permanent teeth. The permanent teeth, excluding the 3rd molars, *erupt* (come out) into their working position.



For early treatment of dental caries, your child should get their first dental checkup between one and one-half and two years of age. This is important before any extensive cavities are established.

Dental caries often appears as a white chalky area on the enamel. It later softens, and then the tooth structure breaks down. If not treated right away, it progresses towards the pulp. It will then require more extensive treatment to save the tooth.

PREVENTION

- In children, dentistry is mainly used for the prevention of dental cavities.
- Sealants can help with prevention of cavities. Sealants are composite resins applied onto surfaces of teeth at risk for decay. They smooth out the fissures and pits, and prevent food entrapment that causes decay.
- Fluoride tablets may also be prescribed in the children over 3 years of age, if your drinking water is not fluoridated. The fluoride absorbed by the tooth enamel makes them less susceptible to caries.
- Thorough daily cleaning with a toothbrush and dental floss is the best way to prevent cavities.
- Regular visits with a dentist for check-ups and cleanings is also very important.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL ATTENTION IF:

- You develop a fever over 102° F (38° C).
- You develop redness and swelling of your face, jaw, or neck.
- You are unable to open your mouth.
- You have severe pain uncontrolled by pain medicine.

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