



Ask the Dentist

Got a question for a dentist?

If you have a question you would like answered by a Ministry of Health-approved dentist, send it to us at enquiries.anjar@gmail.com. This issue, your questions are answered by Imperial Dental Specialist Centre's orthodontist, implantologist, oral surgeon, aesthetics and laser dentist, **Dato' Dr. How Kim Chuan** and **Dr. Kong Sheng Earn**.



BRUSH AWAY

My child is turning two and a half years old and I would like to teach her to brush her own teeth. Could you please provide me with a few tips and tricks on how to impart good brushing techniques to toddlers? On top of that, what toothbrushes and toothpastes are safe for children and do children always need to be supervised during tooth brushing?

I can understand that it can really be difficult to get a child to brush their teeth. Think of it as a fun activity rather than a forced chore. Firstly, get them the right tool. Get them a toothbrush with their favorite cartoon on it. Children's toothpastes usually have more appealing flavour rather than adult toothpaste. Secondly, let them see you brush your own teeth. Parents should be the role model for their child. Get their siblings to join in the fun. You can brush together with them as well. In the beginning stages, you can hold their hand and assist in their brushing, and eventually they will be good at it. I would not stress so much on brushing techniques for a young child. Just go for simple circular motion brushing. Make sure they brush all surfaces of the tooth, both top and bottom teeth, front and back teeth. Do check on them once in a while to see if they are doing it right.

BLOT ON THE LIGHT

I began noticing a dark stain in between my two front teeth a few weeks ago. I tried brushing and flossing that area but the stain didn't get any lighter. Irritated with the way it looked, I decided to visit a dentist a few days ago. After taking a look at it, my dentist told me that it was a cavity. Although she recommended that I fill up the cavity to reduce further damage, I didn't get around to it because my teeth don't hurt. If the stain really is a cavity, why isn't it painful? Apart from that, what are the repercussions of not undergoing treatment?

TO FILL OR NOT TO FILL

I am a mum with a six-year old child. My son is beginning to lose his baby teeth. As a parent who cares about oral hygiene, I check his mouth on a regular basis and found a cavity on one of his molars last week. While I do understand the importance of good dental care, I would like to find out if filling cavities on baby teeth are actually necessary since they naturally drop off anyway. Please help!

This can be a dilemma for many parents; whether to restore the baby tooth or not since it will naturally drop out anyway when he/she is older. The answer is yes. The baby tooth needs to be filled. Permanent tooth follows its chronological age of eruption, meaning it will only erupt when it is time to. Baby molars will be replaced with permanent premolars which will only erupt at the age of around 9-12 years old. If we were to wait for the tooth to naturally exfoliate, we must also take into consideration the age of the child. A badly decayed baby tooth will also cause pain, infection which may affect underlying permanent teeth, and cause face-swelling in severe cases. Extraction of these teeth too early will affect the normal eruption position of a permanent tooth. So if the tooth is decayed, it is best to get it filled.



Smaller cavities are usually asymptomatic. A cavity or dental decay usually starts from a white spot, progresses to a brownish spot, and then turns black and forms a cavity which progressively goes deeper. Sensitivity will only occur once the cavity involves the second layer of the tooth, called dentin. Once it goes deeper and involves the innermost dental pulp, you will feel the pain. In this case, root canal treatment or even extraction will be inevitable for the tooth. The dentist who checks on you will know best whether it is a cavity or just stains.

Cavities which start to form in between the teeth are usually the hardest to detect and it is good news that your dentist detected it before any symptoms. Dentists will remove the infected tooth structure and restore them with fillings to prevent dental decay deeper into the tooth. So please get the tooth filled up.