



KIDDING AROUND



SMALL BITES

 **DO** supervise your child's brushing until age 8 and flossing until age 10.

7 **DO** take your child to the orthodontist by age 7.

 **DO** discuss sealants with your child's dentist as the permanent molars come in.

 **DON'T** forget that healthy meals and snacks are the key to good oral health.

 **DON'T** ignore dental fears. Try a few tricks to help calm anxiety.

Scarlett is your typical 7-year-old – going a million miles a minute with no time for keeping her room clean, brushing her teeth, combing her hair, or going to bed. (You know, those boring things parents always want kids to do.) Even when she's at her busiest, Scarlett's parents always make sure she has time for oral hygiene. Good oral habits at this age – especially as her permanent teeth are coming in – will set her up for a lifetime of healthy smiles.

Getting the Basics Down

Scarlett has been brushing her own teeth for years now. She started **using a pea-size amount of fluoride toothpaste** sometime between the ages of 2 and 3 – as soon as she understood that she needed to spit toothpaste out instead of swallowing it. Now, at 7, Scarlett does a pretty good job of brushing her teeth. Her mom and dad have kept an eye on her oral health routine up until this point to make sure that she brushes for at least two minutes twice a day. By the time she's 8, Scarlett probably won't need brushing supervision at all, though she'll likely still need help flossing daily until she's 10.

Healthy Eats for Healthy Teeth

Scarlett's parents have played a big part in keeping her teeth healthy by making sure she has **tooth-friendly meals and snacks like cheese, yogurt, lean meats, veggies and fruits**. When she does have sweets, Scarlett has them with meals since eating other foods helps stimulate saliva, which helps wash away food particles and reduces the chance for cavities. For most children, cavities are nearly 90 percent preventable, so establishing good oral health habits and watching what Scarlett eats is very important.

Get Familiar with Your Dentist

Though it's common for kids this age to get anxious about dental appointments, Scarlett's parents have taken her to the dentist since she was just a year old. This has allowed her to develop a good relationship with Dr. Shawn. Even so, there are a few things Dr. Shawn and Scarlett's mom do to make sure Scarlett's appointments go smoothly.

- Dr. Shawn always explains what's going to happen, whether it's just a standard cleaning or involves something new, like X-rays.
- Sometimes Scarlett uses earphones to listen to music if she's feeling a little nervous.
- Dr. Shawn lets Scarlett's mom still come into the exam room with her (although many dentists prefer that the child get used to not having a parent present during exams or treatment).
- When the appointment is over, her mom always tells her what a good job she did.

Orthodontist by 7

Even though she likes Dr. Shawn, Scarlett will get to meet a new dentist this year since it's **recommended that children visit the orthodontist by age 7**. She started losing her baby teeth last year, and the eruption of permanent teeth means some problems could develop. Often, the earlier an orthodontist can catch those problems, the easier – and less expensive – they are to fix.

Seal the Deal

Scarlett will continue to shed her baby teeth and grow permanent teeth until she's about 13. When the molar teeth come in – first molars around age 6 and the second molars between 11 and 13 – the dentist might **discuss sealants** with Scarlett's parents. Sealants have the most benefits when applied to newly erupted molars and can last up to 10 years.

Sealants, a thin plastic coating applied directly to teeth, help prevent bacteria from settling into the natural pits and grooves of teeth where most tooth decay in children develops. They can reduce the chances of a tooth forming new decay by up to 70 percent.

Establishing good habits like eating healthy foods, regular dental visits, and daily brushing and flossing while Scarlett is still young will serve her well during her teenage years and beyond.