

Your Child's First Dental Visit

Canonical:

<https://directory.collinsstreetspecialistcentre.com.au/procedures/paediatric-dentistry/your-child-s-first-dental-visit/>

Description:

--- title: "Your Child's First Dental Visit" slug: /paediatric-dentistry/first-dental-visit/ type: procedure specialty: paediatric-dentistry specialists: ["Dr Susan Hinckfuss", "Dr Sarah Scott", "Dr A...

Details:

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Your Child's First Dental Visit: A Parent's Guide

Starting dental care early is one of the kindest things you can do for your child's long-term health. That first appointment — even before your child understands what a dentist is — sets the foundation for a lifetime of good oral health and, just as importantly, a positive relationship with dental care. At Collins Street Specialist Centre, we believe that first visits should be calm, unhurried, and genuinely enjoyable for little ones.

When Should You Bring Your Child?

The short answer: earlier than most parents expect.

****The rule of thumb is: first tooth or first birthday, whichever comes first.****

Most children begin teething around six months of age. By their first birthday, many have several teeth coming through — and those teeth can start decaying almost immediately if oral hygiene isn't established. The Australian Dental Association recommends a dental check within six months of the first tooth erupting.

Why so early? Because the goal of that very first visit isn't necessarily to do a lot of treatment. It's to:

- ****Check development is on track**** — tooth eruption sequence, spacing, jaw growth
- ****Identify early signs of decay**** before they become painful problems
- ****Give parents personalised feeding and hygiene advice**** — including how to clean those first teeth, when to move off the bottle, and what drinks and foods pose the highest risk
- ****Start building a positive association**** with the dental environment — the sounds, the smells, the friendly faces

Children who visit the dentist early and regularly are significantly less likely to experience dental anxiety later in childhood or as adults. That's not a coincidence — it's the result of familiarity and positive reinforcement from an early age.

Signs It's Time to Book That First Visit

Beyond the first-birthday milestone, there are situations where you shouldn't wait:

- **Your child's first tooth has erupted** — even at four or five months
- **You've noticed white or brown spots on teeth** — early signs of decay
- **Your child is still using a bottle or sippy cup filled with milk, formula, or juice at night** — a known risk factor for early childhood caries
- **Teeth seem crowded, unusually spaced, or late to arrive**
- **Your child has had a knock or fall affecting the mouth**
- **You're simply unsure about anything** — from thumb-sucking habits to tongue ties

There's no such thing as attending too early. Our specialists see babies from just a few months old.

What to Expect at Collins Street Specialist Centre

Our paediatric dental team is trained specifically to work with children — not just their teeth, but their behaviour, their anxieties, and their natural curiosity. Every visit at CSSC Level 8 is tailored to your child's age and temperament.

Before You Arrive

We encourage you to frame the appointment in a positive way at home. Avoid using words like "needle," "hurt," or "nothing bad will happen" — children pick up on these cues. Instead, keep it simple and upbeat: "We're going to meet someone who helps keep your teeth strong."

You might also try playing "dentist" at home beforehand — counting teeth with a toothbrush, taking turns opening wide. Familiarity with the process reduces the unknown factor considerably.

At the Practice

For very young children (under two), the first visit often involves a **knee-to-knee examination** — where your child sits on your lap, facing you, and then leans back into the dentist's lap for a brief, gentle look inside the mouth. This keeps your child in close contact with you throughout.

A typical first visit may include:

- A gentle examination of the teeth, gums, jaw, and bite
- Counting and naming teeth together (a favourite with toddlers)
- A quick, gentle clean and polish if appropriate
- Digital X-rays if indicated (we use low-dose paediatric settings)
- A thorough discussion with you about diet, feeding habits, and home care
- A fluoride application if recommended for the child's cavity risk level

There is absolutely no pressure. If your child becomes unsettled, we simply stop and try again another day. Forcing a dental examination on an unwilling child is counterproductive — and it's not how we work.

The Tour Factor

Many children love a brief "show and tell" — we show them the chair that goes up and down, the light that helps us see, the little mirror that counts teeth. Curiosity is a wonderful thing to harness. Our team is experienced at making the ordinary seem fascinating.

Home Care Advice for Parents

From birth: Wipe your baby's gums with a clean, damp cloth after feeds.

First tooth: Begin brushing with a soft infant toothbrush and a tiny smear of low-fluoride toothpaste (children's formula, 0–2 years). Brush twice daily, including before bed.

****Ages 2–5:**** A pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste. Continue brushing for them — most children don't have the coordination to do it effectively themselves until around age seven or eight.

****Diet tips:**** - Limit fruit juice — even 100% juice is high in natural sugars - Avoid putting your child to bed with a bottle of anything except water - Introduce a straw cup or open cup by 12 months; phase out bottle use by 18 months - Cheese and water make excellent after-snack choices — both neutralise mouth acid

****Night-time brushing matters most.**** Saliva production drops while we sleep, making teeth more vulnerable to acid attack overnight.

Why See a Specialist Paediatric Dentist?

A specialist paediatric dentist completes at least three additional years of postgraduate clinical training beyond their dental degree — specifically focused on child development, child psychology, behaviour management, and the treatment of conditions unique to developing teeth and jaws.

This matters because children are not simply small adults. Their teeth, jaws, and psychological responses to dental care are fundamentally different. A specialist understands how to adapt every aspect of an appointment — from the language used to the clinical technique — to suit the age, temperament, and development of each individual child.

Registered specialist paediatric dentists hold specialist registration with the Dental Board of Australia, which you can verify at AHPRA.gov.au.

Our Paediatric Specialists

****Dr Susan Hinckfuss**** — BSc (Melb), DCD (Melb) — holds a specialist doctorate in paediatric dentistry from the University of Melbourne, with three years of additional academic appointment as Assistant Clinical Professor at the University of Minnesota. Dr Hinckfuss is experienced in managing anxious children, children with ASD, dental trauma, early childhood caries, and enamel defects.

****Dr Sarah Scott**** — BBiomedSci (Hons), BDent, DCLinDent (Paeds) — brings a holistic, family-centred approach to paediatric care, with over 15 years of experience across public and private paediatric dental settings.

****Dr Angel Babu**** — DCLinDent PAED (Otago) — sees patients from birth to 18 years, with particular expertise in special needs dentistry, high-risk caries management, and treatment under sedation and general anaesthesia. Dr Babu is a senior dental registrar at the Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne and is registered in both Australia and New Zealand.

****Dr Aish Kesava**** — DCD (Paeds) — is a specialist paediatric dentist with a focus on comprehensive paediatric care across all age groups. *(Extended clinical biography forthcoming.)*

Our specialists consult from Level 8, Manchester Unity Building, 220 Collins Street, Melbourne CBD. No referral is required to book an appointment.

Related Treatments

- **[**Dental Anxiety in Children**]**(/paediatric-dentistry/dental-anxiety-children/) — If your child is nervous about dental visits, we have a range of proven approaches - **[**Fissure Sealants**]**(/paediatric-dentistry/fissure-sealants/) — Preventive treatment to protect back teeth from decay - **[**Childhood Tooth Decay**]**(/paediatric-dentistry/childhood-tooth-decay/) — Understanding

and treating early childhood caries - **[**Early Orthodontic Intervention**]**(/orthodontics/early-intervention/) — Monitoring jaw and bite development from an early age