

# Early Intervention in pediatric Dentistry: Nurturing lifelong Oral health Habits

D. Deaconu (Daniel Deaconu), Ch. Racek (Christoph Racek),  
A. Czirfusz (Attila Czirfusz)

St. Elisabeth University of Health and Social Work in Bratislava,  
Bratislava, Slovakia

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## E-mail address:

czirfusza@gmail.com

## Reprint address:

Daniel Deaconu  
Namestie 1. maja 1  
P.O. Box 104  
810 00 Bratislava  
Slovakia

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## Abstract:

Early intervention in pediatric dentistry is crucial in influencing children's oral health trajectory and establishing habits that may last a lifetime. Pediatric dentists strive to develop good dental hygiene habits in young children via early detection, treatment, education, and prevention (Happykidsdental, 2024). To foster good dental hygiene habits for life, this study explores the many aspects of early intervention in pediatric dentistry.

Pediatric dentistry is essential for youngsters to have healthy teeth and gums. It considers the specific requirements and difficulties during infancy and goes beyond regular dental check-ups (Wang, 2023). Pediatric dentists provide the groundwork for optimal dental health throughout a child's life by concen-

trating on early intervention, individualized treatments, and preventative care (Krol and Whelan, 2022). They make the dentist's office a fun place for kids, encouraging them to have good experiences there and teaching their parents how to care for their teeth better (Happykidsdental, 2024). Issues such as thumb-sucking, teething, and assisting youngsters with orthodontic troubles are also part of a pediatric dentist's expertise (Lin, 2022). Pediatric dentists are medical professionals who focus on children's oral and dental health (dentalcare.com, 2023). They help children maintain good teeth and jaw development, which benefits their general health.

Pediatric dentistry is a subspecialty of general dentistry that focuses on the specific problems and requirements of dental health in children. It covers a lot of ground, from general dental checkups and education to more precise treatments for common problems in children and teenagers (Clinical Affairs Committee, 2012). Dental treatment for children goes beyond just fixing cavities; pediatric dentists also work to alleviate anxiety and promote a good attitude toward the dentist from a young age (Happykidsdental, 2024). Building a solid foundation for excellent dental health throughout a child's life begins in the early years (Baker, Lee and Wright, 2019). The importance of early interventions in establishing excellent oral hygiene habits and avoiding dental disorders before they happen is acknowledged in this particular area (Krol and Whelan, 2022). Pediatric dentists play a dual role as healthcare practitioners and educators, helping children and their families maintain good oral health and wellness.

The field of pediatric dentistry focuses on the dental health and welfare of children from the time they are infants until they reach puberty (Wang, 2023). Encouraging youngsters to form good habits with their teeth and gums is integral to this niche field's mission to promote dental health (Lin, 2022). The formative years are essential to provide the groundwork for excellent dental health throughout a child's life.

## Education and Awareness

Teaching children how to properly care for their teeth and gums is an essential first step in pediatric dentistry early intervention programs. In this process, parents are the primary instructors, and pediatric dentists are vital in providing them with the necessary information (Krol and Whelan, 2022). They teach parents the value of preventative dental care, the best ways to clean their teeth, and how food choices affect their children's oral health (Sanchez and Childers, 2000). With this information, parents should encourage their children to practice good dental hygiene (Owen et al., 2022).

Educating parents and caregivers is integral to pediatric dentistry, which extends beyond only treating children. Kids' dentists encourage parental involvement in their children's dental care by giving detailed instructions on proper oral hygiene, healthy eating, and other behaviors that affect teeth and gums (Happykidsdental, 2024). Kids can benefit from their pediatric dentists' guidance and instruction regarding maintaining healthy teeth and gums for the rest of their lives (Broughton et al., 2014).

Because sugar consumption is a significant risk factor for dental caries, pediatricians can help prevent these cavities by guiding their pa-

tients toward healthier eating habits and more balanced nutrition (NHS, 2024). When the baby and the mother choose to breastfeed exclusively for the first six months and continue to do so when supplementary meals are given for at least a year, the risk of caries may be reduced (Krol and Whelan, 2022). Pediatricians can help families create a nighttime routine that promotes good oral health and reduces the likelihood of dental caries, which can negatively affect a child's health and development (Clinical Affairs Committee, 2012). Pediatricians recommend that parents and caregivers wean newborns off bottles before their first birthday to reduce the amount of sugar that gets stuck in a child's teeth even after brushing (Krol and Whelan, 2022). Parents and guardians might benefit from counseling on the significance of limiting their children's intake of foods and beverages that contain added sugars.

The risk of caries can be reduced by avoiding sugared drinks and juices and reducing the quantity and frequency of meals with added sugars. It is recommended by pediatricians that children drink only water between meals, ideally fluoridated tap water (YALÇIN and ÖZTÜRK, 2022). It is discouraged to consume 100% juice before the age of one, and children between the ages of one and three should drink at most four ounces daily (Krol and Whelan, 2022). Children between the ages of four and six should only drink four to six ounces of juice daily. Finally, healthcare practitioners may encourage healthy eating habits by counseling families to follow USDA recommendations.

### **Preventive Measures**

Preventive procedures like dental sealants and fluoride treatments are crucial to protect teeth from cavities and other oral health problems. Fluoride treatments can be applied topically or systemically to enhance tooth enamel and prevent caries (Aviv Shmueli et al., 2023). Sealants are applied to grooves and fissures of teeth with the aim of further protecting them from food and bacteria (Lin, 2022). Children with a high risk of having dental caries, which could be due to bad eating habits or improper oral hygiene, can benefit a lot from these treatments (Wang, 2023).

The power to act at an early stage is the greatest advantage of pediatric dentistry. Drawing on

close observation of a child's dental health, pediatric dentists can pick up problems early and act fast (Happykidsdental, 2024). The potential for more extensive and costly treatments may be reduced by early detection of tooth problems through preventive techniques (Mora et al., 2013). Ensuring that children's oral health remains on track requires early intervention, which includes monitoring tooth eruption and resolving orthodontic issues (Wang, 2023).

The value of good oral hygiene lies in controlling the levels and activity of disease-causing bacteria in the oral cavity and delivering fluoride to the surface of the tooth (Lin, 2022). Parents and caregivers may transmit harmful microorganisms to their children; therefore, it is crucial to provide both the parent or caregiver and the youngster with advice in advance (dentalcare.com, 2023). A parent or guardian can set a positive example for the child by brushing regularly and maintaining a healthy relationship with the dentist (Owen et al., 2022). It is recommended that parents or guardians instruct their children to brush their teeth with a little bit of fluoridated toothpaste twice a day as soon as their teeth sprout (Boustedt et al., 2019). A small quantity about the size of a pea may be used after the third birthday (Krol and Whelan, 2022). In addition, pediatricians might recommend that children have their parents or guardians help them clean their teeth until they reach the age of 10, when they typically become proficient at it on their own (Aviv Shmueli et al., 2023).

Multiple methods exist for delivering fluoride to teeth: water fluoridation, the self-administration of fluoride products, including toothpaste, rinses, and supplements, and professional treatments, such as silver diamine fluoride and fluoride varnish (Krol and Whelan, 2022). Families, particularly those without access to early and regular continuing dental treatment, greatly benefit from fluoride as a preventative primary care intervention (Clinical Affairs Committee, 2012). During preventive checkups, physicians may ask parents about their kid's exposure to fluoride from drinking fluoridated water and other sources, and they can recommend that the child have fluoride in the form of oral and topical applications regularly to help keep their teeth healthy.

An intervention that maximizes the amount of fluoride in drinking water, known as water fluoridation, protects teeth both before and after erupting. With a lifetime cost per person that is less than that of 1 dental repair, water fluoridation is an affordable way to prevent dental cavities (Krol and Whelan, 2022). The majority of bottled waters are deficient in fluoride. Many families that are more likely to have dental caries use bottled water rather than tap water that has been fluoridated (Aviv Shmueli et al., 2023). If a child's main water supply lacks fluoride, a doctor may recommend fluoride supplements for children six months and above.

One of the most effective ways to coat teeth with fluoride is fluoride toothpaste. Both baby and permanent teeth may benefit from fluoride toothpaste to lessen the risk of dental caries (Happykidsdental, 2024). Another method of applying fluoride topically is fluoride mouth rinses, which have been linked to decreased caries in the permanent teeth of children and adolescents, especially at educational institutions.

A significant decrease in dental cavities is linked to applying fluoride varnish to primary or permanent teeth two to four times yearly. Doctors may apply fluoride varnish to the teeth of youngsters as old as one in most states (Krol and Whelan, 2022). Toothpaste made of silver diamine fluoride, an ammonia solution with silver and fluoride ions, helps stop the progression of caries in children and may be used on both baby and permanent teeth, even ones that have cavitated to the dentin (Boustedt et al., 2019). Silver diamine fluoride therapy should be a continuing component of a caries control strategy to get the optimum results for each patient per the principles of a dental home (Krol and Whelan, 2022). When a patient and dentist form a lasting connection, the patient receives complete, always-available, coordinated, family-centered oral health treatment.

### Monitoring and Early Detection

Pediatric dentists can carefully monitor their patients' tooth development when they see them for checkups regularly. To intervene early, dentists use diagnostic technologies and clinical tests to detect any problems in their early stages. Early intervention reduces the likelihood of long-term consequences for patients with con-

ditions, including misalignment, malocclusion, and developmental abnormalities (Happykidsdental, 2024). In addition, immediate management enables the preservation of the afflicted teeth's integrity and the prevention of future degeneration when dental disorders like cavities or gum disease are detected early.

The dental care requirements of adults and children are distinct. They need extra attention as their smiles develop. Pediatric dentists are well-versed in and able to meet these specific requirements (Lin, 2022). Their knowledge allows them to treat youngsters at the right age, keep tabs on their tooth growth, and teach them how to care for them properly (Krol and Whelan, 2022). Pediatric dentistry provides individualized care to promote healthy tooth development, including cavity prevention and fluoride treatments.

### Behavioral Guidance

Pediatric dentists can help parents and kids develop good habits when caring for their teeth and gums. To encourage healthy tooth growth, methods are taught to discourage destructive behaviors like thumb sucking and using a pacifier for too long (American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, 2020). Dentists also use techniques to help nervous kids feel more at ease during their appointments (Krol and Whelan, 2022). Children may develop a lasting respect for dental hygiene by seeing their pediatric dentist in a welcoming and encouraging setting (Meraj, 2018).

Things like thumb sucking, teething, and baby bottle tooth decay are unique to children's dental health. Experts in pediatric dentistry can help with these concerns by providing advice and treatment tailored to the specific needs of children (Happykidsdental, 2024). To ensure kids have excellent oral health throughout childhood, they can provide great recommendations on what to eat, how to brush teeth, and how to avoid problems (YALÇIN and ÖZTÜRK, 2022).

Nonnutritive oral habits, including sucking one's thumb or finger, are a common subject of conversation with parents or caregivers. Due to pacifiers' protective impact on sudden infant death syndrome incidence beyond the first month of life, the AAP suggests that parents/caregivers consider giving them a pacifier during naptime and nighttime (Krol and Whelan, 2022). When

sucking for reasons other than nutrition persists beyond the age of three, a visit to the dentist is in order (American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, 2020). Although children that suck on a pacifier are less likely to have malocclusions compared to those that suck on their digits, the risk of malocclusions increases with the length of time that a pacifier or digit is sucked (Krol and Whelan, 2022). Malocclusions are also less common in infants whose mothers breastfeed.

Some kind of oral trauma affects 25% of school-aged children. Pediatricians can assist in avoiding such injuries by encouraging the use of automobile safety seats, being aware of the danger of electrical cords injuring the mouth, and advising parents and caregivers to cover sharp edges of home furniture at the level of walking toddlers (Krol and Whelan, 2022). Pediatricians can also recommend using mouthguards for games like baseball, field hockey, and basketball that pose a high risk of orofacial injuries.

### **Prompt Treatment**

To maintain good oral health, it is essential to treat issues such as cavities, gum disease, and other conditions as soon as possible (Broughton et al., 2014). Dental professionals work hard to restore patients' teeth to their best via preventative treatments and restoration operations like fillings and root canals (Happykidsdental, 2024). Pediatric dentists can help keep teeth healthy and reduce the likelihood of problems by treating cavities and other dental issues quickly.

The foundation of pediatric dentistry is preventative care. The best way to keep your teeth and gums healthy is to see your dentist regularly for cleanings and preventive treatments like sealants and fluoride (Grosso et al., 2007). Pediatric dentists may save their young patients a lot of trouble, discomfort, and expensive and intrusive treatments by spotting problems early and treating them quickly (Happykidsdental, 2024). Pediatric dentistry has the capacity to intervene early and, as such, has a great advantage. Thanks to an attentive examination of the oral status of a child, pediatric dentists can anticipate possible dental problems and promptly intervene (Krol and Whelan, 2022). The magnitude of the cost for more complex and costly treatments can be reduced by the earlier detection of tooth problems using preventative approaches (Lin, 2022).

Maintaining children's oral health trajectory is achieved through early intervention, comprising monitoring tooth emergence and resolving orthodontic problems.

### **Multidisciplinary Oral Health Program (OHP) in German Children**

Caries prevalence and experience are reduced in participants of an OHP program according to an assessment of the multidisciplinary OHP for early childhood caries (ECC) in 5-year-old Thuringian children in Germany (Wagner and Heinrich-Weltzien, 2016). Caries are more common in children from low-income families, those who drink sugary drinks frequently throughout the day, and those who breastfeed/bottle feed for longer periods. However, children can reduce their risk of developing caries through good oral hygiene practices, such as brushing their teeth at a young age and having an adult supervise them (Law, 2007). Prevention of ECC may be achieved by a program that includes early maternal counseling, the creation of a dental home, enrollment of children in a recall system based on caries risk, ongoing dental treatment, and fluoride varnish (Wagner and Heinrich-Weltzien, 2016). Families participating in the OHP begin cleaning their teeth sooner and have their children wash their teeth under supervision more often (Wagner and Heinrich-Weltzien, 2016). Children should brush their teeth with fluoride toothpaste at least twice daily, preferably under a parent's watchful eye, to reduce the risk of dental caries (Mora et al., 2013). If parents brush their children's teeth twice a day, it will remove more plaque and clean them better.

Recent research has shown that dental decay is more common in children whose parents do not regularly wash their teeth and in children who start brushing their teeth later in the day (Boustedt et al., 2019). Therefore, it's crucial for parents to begin brushing their child's teeth alongside them as soon as the first tooth comes in and to be there to help and watch them while they do it (Law, 2007). German health insurance companies recommend that children receive their first dental checkup between 30 and 42 months (Wagner and Heinrich-Weltzien, 2016). Even at the tender age of three, children feel the effects of ECC (Wagner and Heinrich-Weltzien, 2016). First dental checkups should be sched-



uled no later than 12 months of age and no later than six months after the first tooth erupts, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAPD) (Sanchez and Childers, 2000). During the first dental checkup, the dentist may assess the child's risk of cavities, advise the caretaker on proper nutrition and oral hygiene, and enroll the child in a personalized reminder system based on their risk. More regular dental checkups are necessary for children whose risk of cavities is high compared to those with low or moderate risk (Clinical Affairs Committee, 2012). Plaque removal, re-evaluation of caries risk, and expert fluoride varnish administration are all possible restorative or preventative actions.

According to the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, all babies should begin applying fluoride varnish to their primary teeth as soon as they erupt. Research shows that frequent dental checkups and counseling for mothers may change families' eating habits (Wagner and Heinrich-Weltzien, 2016). Compared to other groups, children in the OHP consumed less sugary snacks and drinks throughout the day. The risk of acquiring caries increases when a bottle containing sugary or acidic liquids is used for frequent feedings (Mora et al., 2013). There is conflicting evidence in the literature about the link between breastfeeding and dental caries. According to a recent meta-analysis, the risk for ECC is increased by a cariogenic diet, insufficient oral hygiene habits, and extended, frequent, and nocturnal nursing after one year of age (Wagner and Heinrich-Weltzien, 2016).

Many children's healthcare habits, including what they eat and how often they brush their teeth, are shaped by their moms and other primary caregivers. Mothers who regularly receive anticipatory instruction and motivational interviewing techniques may help their children learn to self-manage their dental health (Grosso et al., 2007). Another important finding of research is that socioeconomic status (SES) significantly affects ECC development (Baker, Lee and Wright, 2019). Those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are reported to have a higher prevalence of ECC (Baker, Lee and Wright, 2019). Participating children from low-SES families had a greater prevalence of caries than those from middle- or high-SES families (Wagner and Heinrich-Weltzien, 2016).

## Conclusion

Early intervention in pediatric dentistry plays a pivotal role in nurturing lifelong oral health habits in children. Pediatric dentists work hard to establish good dental hygiene habits in their young patients using early teaching, preventative measures, monitoring, behavioral guidance, and timely treatment. Pediatric dentists help children's oral and general health by focusing on preventive measures and creating a happy dental experience. This sets children up for a lifetime of good oral health.

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