



PEDIATRIC DENTISTS

Kids' teeth are different than adults' in many ways. They are smaller, have a thinner layer of enamel, the top coating on the tooth, and are even a different shade of white.

Their dentists are different too.

All dentists check teeth, fill cavities, and perform root canals. However, pediatric dentists do all this to children. From the perspective of Dr. Ari Kupietzky, a pediatric dentist in Jerusalem, the greatest difference between adults' teeth and children's is the fact that kids' teeth are in the mouth of a child. Children react differently than adults, have different abilities and fears, and need different treatment. A pediatric dentist is trained to deal with children's physical and emotional needs.

THE LITTLE DIFFERENCES IN LITTLE TEETH

The physical structure of kids' teeth is different than that of adults. Because there is a thinner level of enamel, cavities occur far more quickly. Furthermore, children's nerves are wired differently than adults, so a child can have a very deep cavity, but feel no tell-tale pain. These factors mean that some kids may need more dental treatment than adults. Furthermore, there are small holes that can be ignored in an adult's mouth but must be treated in a child's.

Before you get alarmed, let me quickly assure you that on the other hand, children's treatment is often quicker and easier. A child's root canal can be done in under a half hour. An adult's treatment would take far longer.

Another area of dentistry which tends to apply mainly to kids is that

of **trauma**, sudden injury. While most adults don't fall off their bikes, or get hit in the mouth with a basketball, it happens to kids all the time. A pediatric dentist has to be skilled at "putting Humpty Dumpty back together again."

There are also many emotional differences between big people and little ones. Children have a hard time sitting still, can be afraid of the new experience, or react badly to pain. Dr. Ofira Michelson, a general dentist who has been treating children for a number of years, finds this one of the most exciting and challenging aspects of her job. "You aren't just filling teeth," she explains, "you are doing all you can to ensure that the treatment goes smoothly. You are practicing not just dentistry, but psychology, as well."

Indeed, **psychology**, the study of the human mind, is one of the topics studied when dentists go back for another two to four years of training to become certified as pediatric dentists. This is in addition to the six to eight years that all dentists spend learning the profession. Pediatric dentists also cover a lot of **orthodontics**, the study of the movement of teeth. This is particularly important during childhood. Sometimes removing a crooked tooth at an early age can prevent serious problems in the future.

AN EARLY START

A dentist should be part of a kid's life from a very young age. Pediatric dentists recommend bringing a child for his first dental visit six months after his first tooth emerges. "What on earth does a dentist do for a one-year-old?" you may be wondering. In truth this appointment is more for the parents than for the child. This is a chance for the dentist to find out about all sorts of troublesome habits — thumb sucking, bottles in the bed at night, extensive use of a pacifier — and discuss them with the parents. He demonstrates the proper way for teeth to be cleaned and makes sure



Even waiting time is fun at Dr. Kupietzky's office

the teeth are growing properly. This visit is important for the little person as well. He gets to know the dentist in a bright cheery office, during a pleasant visit. If he later has to come back for more serious treatment, he is already comfortable in his "dental home."

GETTING THROUGH TREATMENT

Dental treatment can be painful at times. Pediatric dentists have a wide

range of materials and methods to help minimize the discomfort. Older, mature children can get a shot of anesthesia, which numbs the tooth, just like their parents. Younger children (aged roughly four to six) may get a dose of laughing gas which helps them relax and makes the time seem to pass more quickly. Very young children (aged two to four) may also be given a sedative, which helps them stay calm.

Pediatric dentists use far more than medications. Dr. Kupietzky has a three step method for helping kids through treatment: **tell, show, and do**. First he **speaks** with the child and tells him what he plans on doing. Next, he **shows** him his equipment. Only then does he actually **perform** the treatment. Dr. Michelson keeps up a steady flow of stories, information, and explanations to help distract a child from treatment. There are a few tricks of the trade, which all dentists use. They jiggle the cheek while giving an injection so the child barely notices it going on. They also make sure to administer it in such a way that their hand blocks the needle so the patient doesn't see it. We all know, after all, that the worst part about having a shot is seeing the needle! >>>

RATE YOUR JUNK

Let's face it: most nosh is simply not good for your teeth. But not all sugar is equal. There are a few facts to keep in mind when choosing a snack. Firstly, cavities form from germs on our teeth called **plaque**. When plaque comes in contact with sugar it releases acid, which then eats away at our teeth. The longer sugar is touching our teeth, the worse the results. Secondly, timing is important. Saliva has molecules which help kill bacteria. Chewing produces saliva in greater quantities, so the best time to eat a sugary treat is at the end of a meal.

Now that you know all this, let's test your knowledge. Below are four snack possibilities. Rate them from best to worse, and check the next page to see if you were right.

1. A can of cola between meals.
2. A caramel taffy after lunch.
3. A piece of chocolate pie after your Shabbos *seudah*.
4. Pretzels at recess.

Check your answers on the next page!





Partners in his profession, these stuffed animals give Dr. Kupietzky's office a friendly charm. The machine to the left gives the intense white light that helps sealant harden. (see box below)

SECRETS OF SUCCESS

What makes a good pediatric dentist? “A dentist’s job is in many ways similar to that of a teacher,” says Dr. Kupietzky. Indeed, much of his job involves teaching children better habits so they will not need to spend too much time with him. “A good pediatric dentist needs the same skills as a good teacher,” says Dr. Kupietzky. “You need to be compassionate, assertive, authoritative,

and very self-confident.” Why the self-confidence? “Children are masters at reading body language. They can tell in a minute if you know what you are doing. They obviously feel a lot safer if you seem sure of yourself.” A sense of humor is a big plus, he adds.

It’s important to like kids, Dr. Michelson points out. “You have to be able to connect with them, talk to them, and see the world through their eyes.” It also helps to be fast. “Kids don’t have a

SEALANT: SEALING THOSE CRACKS

You may have heard your dentist mention that he’d like to put sealant on some of your teeth. Did you wonder what it was he’d be sealing and how he would do so?

Sealant is plastic material that is poured into the cracks of teeth to keep help prevent plaque, harmful bacteria (germs) on the tooth, from building up. Look in the mirror at your back teeth. Notice how bumpy they are? Do you see the indentation in the center? These grooves are known as pits and fissures. They are extremely difficult to keep clean, as the bristles of the toothbrush are too large to fit in those spaces. Plaque and acid can get in and eat away at the surface.

This is where sealant can help. The material is poured in, fills up those pits, and makes the tooth smoother and flatter, helping keep plaque out. Sealant is made of liquid white plastic. If your dentist decides to seal your tooth, he will first clean it with a small brush. Then he will put on etching gel which prepares the surface, and ensure the tooth is completely dry. Now, the sealant can be dabbed on. An intense white light helps the liquid harden. Your sealant can last for a number of years, and will be usually applied only to permanent teeth, from the ages of six to fifteen. Just make sure to brush the sealant, so the procedure will be worthwhile!



FLUORIDE: PREVENT CAVITIES BY HAVING A DRINK

Almost one hundred years ago, a dentist in America’s Midwest discovered that his patients had almost no cavities. They also had spotting on their teeth. In time, he tracked the cause of both these conditions — a high level of **fluoride** in the water. Fluoride is a natural element that is found in the earth’s crust, in air, and in water. Tests done on children living in different areas of United States found that those in areas which had a lot of fluoride in the water had less than half the number of cavities as children who received little fluoride. The fluoride mixed with the enamel of the teeth and produced stronger teeth. The governments began adding fluoride to the drinking water — one part fluoride to every million parts water, enough to strengthen teeth, but not spot them.

Fluoride in the water is known as **systemic fluoride**. It goes from your drink to your blood stream, and from there to your bones. Not every community puts fluoride in its water; you can find out by calling your municipality. Other ways to obtain fluoride are by using fluoridated toothpaste and having your dentist apply a fluoride gel. These methods are known as **topical fluoride** because they are applied directly to the tooth.



lot of patience for sitting still, so if you can work quickly and efficiently, it really helps.”

Dr. Michelson loves her work. Her parents had always wanted her to learn medicine but she didn’t want to have to work the long hours typical of doctors. She thought of dentistry, and got a job working for a dentist one summer. After that, she was hooked. She likes working with people and likes using her hands for delicate projects. Being a dentist lets her do both. “After I work with a kid for a while, I have a real relationship with them,” she adds. “They become my friends. They wait to see me and draw pictures for me, and that gives me a great feeling.”

THIS IS IT

So, what advice do these skilled dentists have for our readers? I bet you can guess it on your own. “Sometimes a child will come to me with his mouth in terrible condition,” relates Dr. Michelson. “He and his parents assume it’s because he was unlucky enough to be born with ‘awful teeth.’ Then I start asking questions. Does he brush at least once a day? Not always. Come in for a check-up every six to eight months?

Not really. Floss once his teeth begin touching each other? No. Make sure to avoid very sugary food? Well, you know how it is ... If a person doesn’t take good care of his teeth, how can he expect them to stay in good shape?”

One eleven-year-old girl who visited Dr. Michelson had just got her complete set of adult teeth. “Be careful with these teeth,” warned Dr. Michelson. “This is the last set you get.” “That’s it?!” asked the girl in shock, “I don’t get any more?” She had assumed that just as her first set had rotted and been pulled, and a new set then grew, she could keep going through that process again and again. But, as you must know, that isn’t how it works. Your second set of teeth is all you have to use until 120. Treat them well. ☺

ANSWERS TO RATE YOUR JUNK

From best to worse:

1. Pretzels — a very small quantity of sugar.
2. The chocolate pie after the meal — It doesn’t spend too long in your mouth and you have plenty of saliva to fight the sugar.
3. The can of cola between meals — It goes down fast, but there isn’t much saliva in your mouth. Furthermore, the cola has lots of sugar and acid as well.
4. The caramel taffy — No matter when you eat it, taffy can linger in your mouth for hours. It’s a killer for your teeth.

