



# caring for YOUR CHILD'S TEETH

## during your pregnancy [before birth]

- If you keep your mouth healthy, your baby is more likely to have healthy teeth and gums.
- Science shows that mothers with active tooth decay problems, gum problems or both will transmit the bad bacteria to the baby and make the baby more susceptible to decay and gum disease.
- It is safe to see your dentist during pregnancy, so that your mouth can be in optimum health. Discuss having decayed teeth repaired and getting treatment for gum disease.

## birth to 6 months [before teeth erupt]

- Begin cleaning your baby's mouth during the first few days after birth.
- Wipe baby's gums with a clean, soft washcloth after each feeding. This helps your infant get used to having the mouth cleaned and checked.

## 6 months to 1 year [as teeth erupt]

- As baby teeth begin to appear, a soft washcloth can be used to wipe teeth clean after feedings.
- It is recommended a child receive a dental well baby check-up by their first birthday. Ask your dentist to perform this check-up or to refer you to a pediatric dentist. A pediatrician also may be able to assess a child at high risk for dental decay and refer to a dentist.

## 1 to 3 years [as teeth erupt]

- Children will have all 20 baby teeth between ages 2 to 4.
- Brush your child's teeth at least twice daily. Bedtime is the most important time to make sure the teeth are free of plaque.
- Although the child is gaining independence, parental assistance is needed to brush properly. Some kids older than age 5 still may need supervision.
- Once back molars appear, begin brushing the teeth with a child-size, soft toothbrush and a tiny smear of fluoride toothpaste (choose a brand with the American Dental Association seal). For children ages 2 to 5, a pea-size amount of fluoride toothpaste should be used. Swallowing too much fluoride toothpaste can be harmful to your child.
- Start gentle flossing when the spaces between your child's teeth begin to close. Sometimes the back molars will be close together even though there still are spaces between the front teeth.
- Replace your child's toothbrush when the bristles are bent.
- Check your child's teeth monthly for changes. White spots or lines on the front or back side of teeth are indications of early cavities. See a dentist right away to prevent cavities from becoming worse.
- Schedule regular dental visits for your child.

## thumb sucking & pacifiers

Sucking is a natural reflex and can comfort babies and toddlers. Most children will gradually stop a pacifier or thumb sucking habit between the ages of 2 and 4.

It is best if children stop sucking pacifiers by ages 1 to 2. Studies reveal that children who continue to suck a thumb, finger or pacifier past age 2 can increase the risk of an improper bite, which may permanently distort the shape of the jaws and how teeth align.

Thumb and pacifier sucking can affect the teeth essentially the same way. However, a pacifier habit is often easier to break, because you can take it away. Stopping the thumb sucking habit will be successful only when the child is ready.

If you have concerns about thumb sucking or pacifier use, consult your dentist.



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# start right

PARENTS MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

a practical guide to your  
baby's dental health





# do all you can

## BABY TEETH ARE CRUCIAL

You want to do all you can to ensure your baby’s overall health, but have you thought about their oral health?

Parents may think of a newborn baby as having no teeth, but the primary teeth that will erupt over the next few years already are present beneath the gums when your child is born. These teeth are crucial to your child’s dental development and important to their total health.

**PARENTS MAKE THE DIFFERENCE** by properly cleaning their child’s teeth, ensuring healthy food and beverage choices, and creating good oral health care habits, which help prevent decay from an early age.

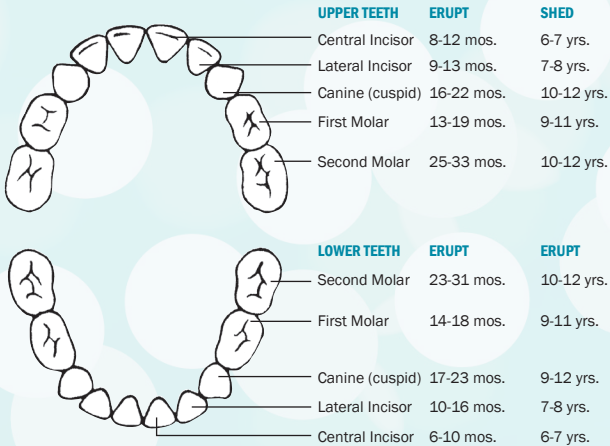
### the importance of “baby” teeth

Primary or “baby” teeth serve your child the same way your teeth serve you: These teeth enable proper chewing and correct speech development, and affect facial appearance. Primary teeth also guide permanent teeth into place, aid in jaw and face formation, and influence your child’s overall health.

### about teething

- Most babies get their first tooth between ages 6 and 14 months. On average, all 20 primary teeth will have erupted by about age 3.
- When teething, babies may become fussy, sleepless and irritable, lose their appetite or drool more.
- To provide relief, they can chew on a cool washcloth, spoon or teething ring. Gums can be massaged with a clean finger. Children’s acetaminophen or ibuprofen can be given an hour before bedtime, according to package instructions.
- Avoid numbing agents like Orajel or Anbesol. Babies can injure themselves if they rub their numb tongue or lips against their teeth. The active ingredient is benzocaine; if swallowed repeatedly, it can cause serious health issues.
- Diarrhea, rashes and a fever are not normal symptoms of teething. If your infant has these symptoms, it could be signs of another illness; consult with your child’s physician.

### primary teeth eruption chart



# what really matters:

## PREVENTING EARLY CHILDHOOD CAVITIES

**It’s not the bottle, it’s the beverage!** As soon as baby teeth come in, decay can start to occur if teeth are not properly cared for. The most common cause of tooth decay in children younger than age 3 is known as “baby bottle tooth decay.” This decay can result from frequent exposure to sugary liquids in both bottles and sippy cups.

Parents may think decay this early doesn’t matter because “it’s just baby teeth.” However, decayed baby teeth can affect the developing permanent teeth yet to come in, as well as the child’s eating, speech, and overall health and self-esteem. Severely decayed teeth not only cause pain, but may result in expensive surgery to fix or remove the teeth. What’s more, infants with tooth decay always will be more cavity prone than infants with healthy teeth. Get started early to help ensure good oral health for your baby!

### what happens to cause decay?

- Milk, formula and juice all contain some kind of sugar, as do many snacks.
- Sugars from beverages and snacks combine with the bacteria in the mouth to create a sticky film, known as plaque.
- If sugars aren’t cleaned from the child’s teeth, this plaque build-up can eat away at tooth surfaces (enamel), which can result in tooth decay.

### what can parents do to prevent decay?

1. Don’t allow your infant or toddler to fall asleep with a bottle or sippy cup filled with anything but water.
2. As long as your infant is taking the bottle or nursing, wipe the gums and teeth after each feeding. As they age, progress to using a child toothbrush and brush at least twice daily, especially before bedtime.
3. Around age 1, wean your infant from the bottle and begin teaching drinking from a regular cup.
4. Try to make milk and juice available at meal time only, so a child isn’t sipping on these beverages throughout the day. Give your child water in between meals and snacks.
5. It’s not just what children drink, but what they eat! Many popular snacks, such as fruit roll-ups and gummy fruit snacks contain extra sugar and coat the teeth. Even dried fruits, like raisins, have natural sugars which can get stuck in and between tooth surfaces, making teeth harder to clean.
6. As an alternative, you can give your child snacks like Jell-O, pudding and yogurt. These may have sugar, but they won’t be stuck on the teeth for long periods of time because they wash away easily. Other great choices are real fruit and cheese, which is not only a healthy snack, but has been shown to fight decay.

