

Infants & Toddlers

oral health for youngsters

Baby Teeth are Important

First teeth are important for children. Taking good care of these teeth is necessary as they are needed for eating, speaking and smiling.

The baby teeth play an important role for later in life – they hold the space for the adult or permanent teeth. When baby teeth are lost too early, it can lead to crowding of adult teeth. Some baby teeth are lost at about age 6 while other stay in the mouth until age 12!

Baby's First Tooth

Baby teeth will first start to appear around the age of 6 months. All 20 baby teeth usually erupt by 30 months. Every child is different and when they appear can differ too, this is normal.



Teething problems may happen when the gums become sore and red. Sometimes there may be fever and irritability. To help your child, try giving your child a cold or frozen teething ring. Sometimes a teething gel or other pain relief can be recommended by your Dentist or Doctor.

Cleaning Baby's Teeth

As soon as teeth start to appear, plaque will form and build up. Removing this plaque daily will help to prevent tooth decay and gum infections.

At the start, use a damp cloth or piece of cotton gauze. Later, you can start to use a soft toothbrush and eventually put a pea-sized amount of toothpaste on. Your child will not have dexterity to brush well until about 9 years, so allow them to brush a little by themselves and then take over.

A good position to be in to brush your child's teeth is by having them sit in between your legs and lean back slightly side on.

Starting Dental Visits

These days it's possible to prevent most dental disease especially cavities in children. Give them the best start by scheduling their first visit at about 2-3 years of age. Talk to your Dentist about preventive treatments to further protect your child's teeth as they develop.

Bottles and Decay

Tooth decay can occur when baby is given a bottle to go to sleep with. Milk (breast or formula), fruit juices or other sweetened drinks will contribute to acid attacks on teeth. Plaque that is present on teeth will produce acid when exposed to these sugars.

Water and Fluoride

It is best to avoid giving a bottle at sleep times or if you choose to give your baby a bottle, put plain tap water in it. It may be necessary to wean your baby by slowly diluting the bottle with water. Tap water is fluoridated and will help to strengthen the enamel on baby's teeth.

Thumb sucking and Dummies

It is common for young children to want to suck a thumb or fingers and most grow out of this habit by age 3 or 4. Prolonging this habit after permanent teeth come through at about age 6, can cause orthodontic problems.

Correctly designed dummies may be used if necessary but never put anything sweet or sticky on it. Left in the mouth for long periods, it could contribute to tooth decay.

Good Food Habits

Starting good eating habits at the outset is a great idea to ensure a healthy child with healthy teeth.

Limiting snacks through the day helps to decrease the chances of tooth decay, especially if the snacks are low in sugar, starch or acids – even in 'natural' foods and drinks.

Healthy Eating

To keep your child's smile healthy, limit snacks and eat nutritious, well-balanced meals made up of foods from the 5 major food groups:

- Breads, cereals and grains
- Fruits
- Vegetables
- Meat, fish, poultry or protein alternates
- Milk, cheese or yoghurt

A balanced diet includes a variety of foods that give their body all the nutrients it needs.