

Dental Care for Your Infant and Toddler

Good dental care is important for your child and to keep teeth healthy for a lifetime. Healthy baby teeth help your child eat well and speak clearly. Baby teeth guide permanent adult teeth into proper position. Some baby teeth are not replaced by permanent teeth until the age of 12 or 13.

When teeth first come in, they are not fully formed or hardened and they may decay easily. It is very important to start dental care early.

What is early childhood tooth decay?

Tooth decay is caused by bacteria in the mouth. This can be passed to the baby. If family members have healthy teeth, they will pass on less bacteria to the baby.

Reduce the chance of passing harmful bacteria to your baby by not sharing toothbrushes, not licking soothers to clean them, and not testing your baby's food with the same spoon that has been in your mouth.


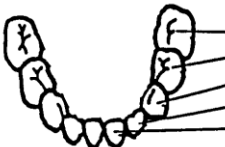
How can tooth decay be prevented?

Good dental care includes cleaning and checking your child's teeth and mouth every day. Lift the lip so you can see along the gum line when cleaning and look for white spots or brown spots which may be early signs of decay.

Gently clean your baby's mouth using a soft baby toothbrush or wet face cloth. When teeth start to come in, use a toothbrush with a smear of fluoride toothpaste (the size of a grain of rice). Brush your child's teeth in the morning and at bedtime.

Use a "pea-sized" amount of fluoride toothpaste on a soft child's toothbrush once all your child's teeth come in. It is a good idea to gently brush your toddler's tongue to remove bacteria that forms there.

When will my child get teeth?

	First Teeth	When Teeth	When Teeth
	Upper	Come In	Fall Out
	central incisors	7 - 12 mos.	6 - 8 yrs.
	lateral incisors	9 - 13 mos.	7 - 8 yrs.
	canines (cuspid)	16 - 22 mos.	10 - 12 yrs.
	first molars	13 - 19 mos.	9 - 11 yrs.
	second molars	25 - 33 mos.	10 - 12 yrs.
	Lower		
	second molars	20 - 31 mos.	10 - 12 yrs.
	first molars	12 - 18 mos.	9 - 11 yrs.
	canines (cuspid)	16 - 23 mos.	9 - 12 yrs.
	lateral incisors	7 - 16 mos.	7 - 8 yrs.
	central incisors	6 - 10 mos.	6 - 8 yrs.

Children have their own schedule for teething. Most children begin teething at about 6 months of age. Your child should have all of his or her first set of teeth – or “baby” teeth – by 3 years of age. The bottom front teeth usually appear first, followed by the top front teeth. In total, 20 teeth should appear – 10 in the top jaw and 10 in the bottom jaw.

Teething may cause some discomfort, making your baby fussy. Your baby may also not want to eat.

Your baby may feel better if allowed to chew on a clean, chilled teething ring, teething toy, or clean wet face cloth.

Teething cookies or biscuits are not a good choice because these can stick to your baby's teeth and cause tooth decay.

Check with your doctor, dentist or health care provider before using teething ointments, gels or tablets, or any other teething items.

Teething does not cause fevers. If your baby has a fever or diarrhea while teething, treat it as you would at any other time. If you have any questions or concerns about your baby's fever or diarrhea, call 8-1-1 to speak with a nurse or contact your health care provider.

What about diet and tooth decay?

Eating sugary foods or drinks or eating snacks all day long may increase the risk of tooth decay.

Starches and sugars from foods produce acid that can break down tooth enamel and cause tooth decay. Fruit juice, sweetened tea, soft drinks, all types of milk, and formula contain sugars that can cause tooth decay if in contact with teeth for long periods of time. Tooth decay can develop when a child uses a bottle with these liquids for long periods, especially during rest or sleep times. There is also a risk if your child continually sips from a bottle, drinking box, or sipper cup during the day.

Water will not harm the teeth. Water is a good choice between regular feeding times and for thirst. Introduce your baby to using a cup between 6 and 9 months of age.

What about soothers or pacifiers?

Soothers or pacifiers are sometimes given to babies during rest, sleep or other times. If you choose to give your baby a soother, here are a few tips:

- Ensure that breastfeeding is well established.
- Choose the right size soother for your baby's mouth.
- Check the soother nipple often – throw it away if it is sticky, cracked or torn.
- Keep the soother clean.
- Avoid dipping the soother in honey or other sweet substances that can cause tooth decay.

Soothers or pacifiers are not recommended once all baby teeth have grown in, usually when your child is about 3 years of age. After this age, regular use of a soother may affect the child's speech and language development. Parents can start to "wean" children off the soother as soon as possible.

What about fluoride?

The Canadian Dental and Medical Associations and the dental professionals of British Columbia recommend fluoride for preventing tooth decay for people of all ages.

Fluoride is a proven, effective and low-cost way to prevent cavities. Fluoride helps make tooth enamel

stronger and better able to resist tooth decay. Some toothpastes do not have fluoride, and some have ingredients not recommended for children. Always check the label. In B.C., there is little natural fluoride and few cities add fluoride to the drinking water. If you are unsure if your water supply contains fluoride, call your local public health unit.

Most children will get enough fluoride from using a small amount of fluoride toothpaste twice a day. Your dentist may recommend additional fluoride for your child.

When should my child go to the dentist?

The Canadian Dental Association recommends regular dental visits starting 6 months after your child's first tooth appears or at about 1 year of age. Your child's first dental visit is a good time to discuss daily dental care, fluoride, and eating habits. If you have a concern about your infant's or toddler's teeth, make an appointment to see your dentist or a dental professional.

For more information

Children in families who receive income assistance or MSP premium assistance are eligible for basic dental care through the Healthy Kids Program. For more information, call 1-866-866-0800 or visit the website at www.mhr.gov.bc.ca/factsheets/2005/healthy_kids.htm.

For more information on dental care, please contact the dental program at your public health unit, your dentist or dental hygienist.

For more HealthLink BC File topics, visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles/index.stm or your local public health unit.

Click on www.HealthLinkBC.ca or call **8-1-1** for non-emergency health information and services in B.C.

For deaf and hearing-impaired assistance, call 7-1-1 in B.C.

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