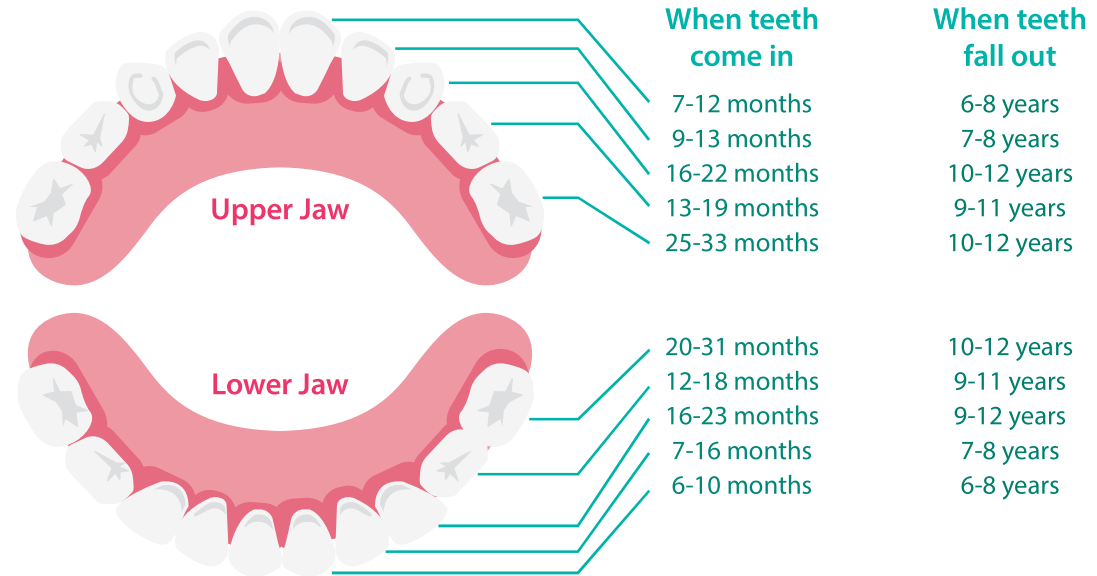


Looking After Your Toddler's Teeth

Taking good care of your toddler's first teeth means better health overall. "Baby teeth" are important for:

- eating
- learning to speak
- jaw growth
- helping adult teeth grow in properly

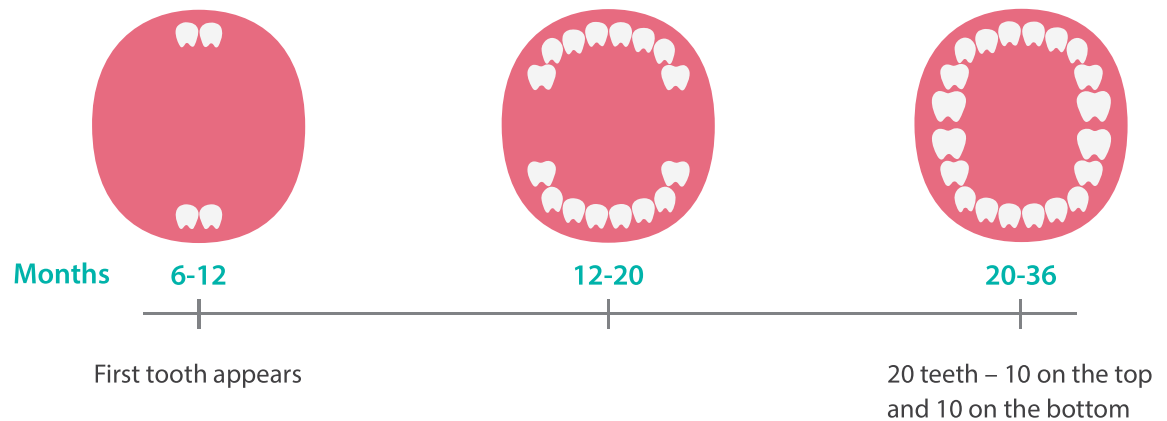
In addition, untreated tooth decay in baby teeth can be painful, spread to adult teeth and cause serious infection in the rest of the body. It can interfere with your child's ability to play, learn, sleep and eat, and lead to poor growth and development. Tooth decay is the main reason young children need to go to the hospital for day surgery.



DID YOU KNOW?
Tooth decay is a preventable disease.

DID YOU KNOW?
"Baby teeth" aren't just for babies. The molars at the back of a child's mouth usually fall out between ages 11 and 13.

How Teeth Usually Grow



Teething

Some toddlers aren't bothered by teething while others are uncomfortable and fussy. Most children will drool.

You can help ease your toddler's discomfort by:

- ✓ letting them chew on a clean, solid teething ring or wet cloth that's been chilled in the fridge (not the freezer)
- ✓ wiping and massaging their gums with a clean finger, cloth or toothbrush
- ✓ using a bib to catch drool and wiping their face

Don't use:

- ✗ teething gels or ointments, which can numb your baby's throat so they are unable to gag and protect themselves from choking
- ✗ teething necklaces – these can be unsafe. If the beads break and your baby swallows them, or if the necklace gets tangled, it could choke or hurt your baby
- ✗ food like teething biscuits or frozen fruit, which can lead to tooth decay
- ✗ liquid or gel-filled teething rings, which can grow bacteria inside and can crack and break open



DID YOU KNOW?

Although teething may be uncomfortable for your toddler, it doesn't cause fever. If they have a fever, treat it as you normally would (see [When Your Toddler is Sick](#)).

Keeping Teeth Healthy

Brush

Once the first tooth comes in, it's time to start brushing your toddler's teeth. Use a soft brush with nylon bristles. (Silicone and rubber bristles don't remove plaque as well.) And replace the brush often – about every 3 months or after the bristles lose shape, and after your child has been sick.



HOW TO Brush your toddler's teeth

1. Squeeze children's fluoride toothpaste (amount the size of a grain of rice) on a child-sized toothbrush. Increase to a pea-sized amount at age 3.
2. Have your child lie in your lap, on the change table or on the floor.
3. Brush gently. Sing or chat while brushing.
4. If your child is able (likely by about age 3), let them spit as needed.
5. Put the toothpaste away out of reach.
6. Repeat twice a day – once in the morning and again after the last evening feeding.

Continue to help your child brush their teeth until they're about 8 years old.

Use fluoride

Fluoride makes enamel stronger and better able to fight tooth decay. Check with your health department or First Nations Government office to see if there's fluoride in your local water. If not, be sure that your child's toothpaste includes it. Teach your child to spit the toothpaste out, but don't worry if they're

not always successful. Even children under 3 can use (and swallow) small amounts of fluoride toothpaste safely.

Floss

Once your toddler's teeth grow enough that they touch each other, floss them once a day. Don't let your child floss their own teeth, because they could damage their gums.

Protect teeth from damage

- ✓ Use the right size car seat, booster seat and seat belt.
- ✗ Don't let your toddler chew on hard things.
- ✗ Don't let your toddler walk around with anything in their mouth.
- ✗ Limit how often your toddler drinks grow , pop or other sugary drinks.
- ✗ If your little one drinks from a bottle at bedtime, it's time to give fewer bottles or just use water in the bottle.

Offer a variety of healthy food and drinks

- ✓ Offer your child meals and snacks at regular times.
- ✓ At 6 months, start helping your child drink from an open cup instead of using a bottle or sip cup.
- ✓ Offer milk with meals, and water for between-meal thirst.
- ✓ If you offer fruit juice use it as part of a meal or snack and put it in an open cup to avoid the tooth decay that constant sipping can cause.

See [Safe, Healthy Foods and Drinks](#) to learn more.

See the dentist

Your toddler should see a dentist by the time they're 12 months old or within 6 months after their first tooth appears. During this first visit, the dentist will look in your toddler's mouth. It's also a good time to talk about dental care and discuss how often your child should visit.



MONEY SENSE

If you've been approved for Medical Services Plan (MSP) Supplementary Benefits, your child may be eligible for the Healthy Kids program or Canadian Dental Care Plan. This can help with the cost of their dental care. See Dental Care, Vision and Hearing in the [Resources](#) section for more information.

Don't share germs

Germs from your mouth can lead to tooth decay in your toddler's mouth. Don't put their soother in your mouth, share toothbrushes or spoons, pre-chew their food, or use your teeth to bite pieces in half for them. And keep your own teeth clean and healthy by brushing and flossing daily and visiting the dentist regularly.



BE AWARE

If there are chalky white spots or crescents on your toddler's teeth along the gums that don't brush off, they may have the beginnings of tooth decay. Fluoride can help stop these spots from turning into cavities that need filling. See your dentist, or contact your local public health unit to ask about public health dental services.

What About Soothers and Thumb-Sucking?

Do not use soothers or pacifiers once all baby teeth have grown in, usually when your child is about 3 years old. After this age, regular use of a soother may affect the child's speech development and teeth positioning. Using a soother can cause ear infections, too.



HOW TO Help your toddler use a soother less

- Start when no other big changes are going on in your family.
- Slowly limit soother time until you get it down to 1 use per day – probably naptime or bedtime.
- Once they're asleep, gently remove the soother from their mouth.
- If they want the soother when they're awake, check if they're hungry, bored, tired or if they need comfort. Offer a cuddle, a blanket, a toy, breastfeeding or chestfeeding or a story instead.
- Praise them for using the soother less, but don't punish them for using it.

Safer soothers

Look for:

- one-piece design
- firmly attached nipple
- no cord (use a clip with a short ribbon instead – but only when your toddler isn't sleeping)
- no toy or stuffed animal attached

Keep it safe by:

- boiling it in water for 5 minutes, then cooling it completely before the first use
- cleaning it regularly in warm, soapy water
- replacing it every 2 months, or sooner if it's sticky, cracked or torn



BE AWARE

Don't let your toddler chew on a soother for teething. It can break and choke them.



DID YOU KNOW?

Cleaning a soother in your own mouth or dipping it in honey or syrup can lead to tooth decay.