
Oral health information for your child

> “Baby” Teeth

Each child has his or her own schedule for teething. Most children begin teething at about six months and most “baby” teeth are in by three years of age. The bottom front teeth usually appear first, followed by the top front teeth.

Although many babies have no teething problems, teething can often cause some discomfort, making the baby irritable, fussy, and not wanting to eat. If your baby has a fever or diarrhea when teething, contact your family doctor.

Your baby may feel better if allowed to chew on a clean chilled teething ring or wet face cloth. Teething cookies or biscuits are **NOT** a good choice because they can stick to your baby’s teeth and cause tooth decay.

Your toddler should have all of his or her first set of teeth (“baby” teeth) by three years of age. Twenty teeth should appear – 10 in the top jaw and 10 in the bottom jaw. Baby teeth are very important. When teeth first come in they are not fully hardened and may decay easily. Some baby teeth are not replaced by permanent teeth until age 12 or 13. Healthy baby teeth will help your toddler look good, eat well and learn how to speak clearly. The baby teeth also guide the permanent teeth into their correct position.

> Diet and tooth decay

Tooth decay is caused by bacteria on the teeth. The bacteria use starches and sugars from foods to produce acid that can break down teeth enamel and cause tooth decay. Your toddler’s teeth are at risk for decay if he or she is still drinking from a bottle filled with anything other than water, especially during rest and sleep periods. The risk is the same if your toddler drinks from a bottle, drinking box or “sippy” cup during the day for extended periods of time. Fruit juice, sweetened tea, pop and even breast milk, cow’s milk and formula all contain sugars that cause tooth decay if left in contact with the teeth for lengthy periods of time. Two of the most important factors related to tooth decay are: 1. How often food is eaten. 2. How long food stays on the teeth.

> Snacking guide for snacks between regular main meals:

- Choose healthy snacks: offer vegetables, fruits and dairy products.
- Vary your daily snack choices.
- Limit sticky snacks. eg. dried fruit, fruit leather, cookies, candy.
- Offer only water between meals.
- Eliminate “sippy” cups.

> Other risk factors for tooth decay are:

- Difficulty brushing your child's teeth.
- Family members with untreated tooth decay.
- Unsupervised brushing and flossing under the age of 10.

> What about fluoride?

Fluoride is a proven effective and low-cost cavity fighter. Fluoride is added to most brands of toothpaste, and is found naturally in some water supplies. There is no fluoride added to the municipal water supplies in the Lower Mainland. When fluoride comes in contact with the tooth surface, it makes the tooth enamel stronger and more resistant to decay. That's why using fluoride toothpaste twice a day is so important in preventing tooth decay. Although many children get enough fluoride from using fluoride toothpaste twice a day, some children who are at risk for tooth decay may need additional fluoride. Ask your dentist for further information if you are concerned that your child is at high risk for tooth decay.

> Preventing tooth decay

With infants, clean your child's mouth every day. Start soon after birth by wiping all around your baby's mouth with a clean, wet face cloth or soft baby toothbrush. This will get the child used to regular cleaning and can ease teething discomfort.

Once teeth appear (at about six months of age) smear a little fluoride toothpaste, the size of a "grain of rice", on a wet face cloth or a baby toothbrush and gently clean your baby's teeth. It is important to get into the habit of doing this for your baby twice a day.

Encourage your child to spit out toothpaste. It is a good idea to gently brush your child's tongue to remove bacteria. Parents need to help brush their children's teeth until at least eight years of age.

> How much toothpaste?

Use an amount the size of a "grain of rice" for children who cannot yet spit. Use a "pea-sized" amount of toothpaste for children who can spit.

> What about soothers and thumb/finger sucking?

Soothers are sometimes given to infants at rest and sleep times or at other times when the baby has been fed but still want to continue suckling. After feeding is well established, if you choose to give your baby a soother, please note the following. 1. Choose a soother that is the right size for your baby's mouth. 2. Check the soother nipple often; if it is sticky, cracked or torn, throw it away. 3. Never put the baby's soother in your own mouth to clean it. This can infect your child with germs that cause tooth decay. 4. Soothers should never be dipped in honey or other sweet substances as this can also cause tooth decay. 5. Soothers and thumb sucking are not recommended for toddlers once their complete set of primary or "baby teeth" have grown in. This usually happens by age three. Continuation of these habits may affect the child's speech development and the normal development of the mouth and jaw. 6. To wean your toddler off their soother, try limiting soother use to rest and sleep times and gently removing it from their mouth after your child is asleep.

> When should my child go to the dentist?

Regular dental visits should begin within 6 months of the first tooth erupting or by the age of one. If you have a concern about your toddler's teeth make an appointment to see a dental professional even if your child is very young and only has a few teeth.