

# Oral health for **infants** & **toddlers**



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Helping your  
child to a healthy  
start to life

**Baby teeth** are important for many reasons. They help your child eat, speak and smile. They also play a vital role in keeping the correct space for the adult teeth to move into later on.

## **Infant feeding**

If feeding your baby with a bottle, make sure you only have infant formula or cooled boiled tap water in it. It is important to take the bottle away when your child has finished feeding, as any formula remaining in the bottle may cause tooth decay. This also applies when you are able to introduce plain full cream milk, usually when your baby is over 1 year old.

## **When do baby teeth come in?**

Your child's first tooth usually erupts through the gum at about 6-9 months of age. You should expect to see a full set of 20 baby teeth in their mouth by 3 years of age.

### **Teething**

Teething can cause some pain and discomfort for your child and you may notice some red and swollen gums. This may make your child irritable and can cause them to dribble more, have flushed cheeks and they may have a change in their eating patterns.





Some infants may have a raised temperature, a change in their bowel movements and nappy rash. It is not known if these effects are directly linked to teething or result from another minor infection that is happening at the same time. When there are signs of serious illness you should seek medical advice, as teething alone may not be the cause.

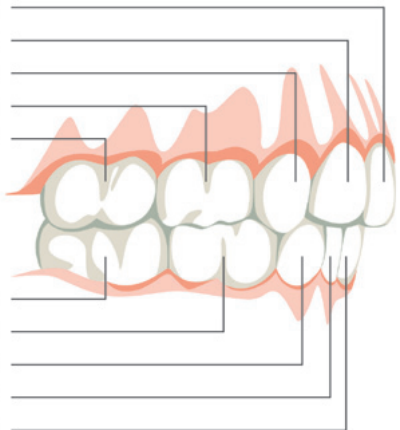
Infants often place fingers and other objects in their mouths during teething as pressure seems to relieve the discomfort. Giving your child a cold teething ring may help.

### Upper Teeth

central incisors	8-12 months
lateral incisors	9-13 months
canines	16-22 months
first molars	13-19 months
second molars	25-33 months

### Lower Teeth

second molars	23-31 months
first molars	14-28 months
canines	17-23 months
lateral incisors	10-16 months
central incisors	6-10 months



## Tooth decay

Just like adult teeth, baby teeth can decay from the time they appear in the mouth. Tooth decay can cause pain, sleep problems and eating problems. Tooth decay in young children is known as Early Childhood Caries. This is caused by plaque, a sticky film of bacteria that coats the teeth.



Healthy baby teeth



Early childhood caries

## How does plaque cause tooth decay?

Plaque bacteria mix with food and produce an acid. If left on the teeth, this acid can eat into the surface of our teeth (enamel), causing tooth decay.



**Break this tooth decay chain** by brushing your child's teeth regularly with a fluoride toothpaste, offering healthy snacks and **limiting or avoiding sweet foods.**

## Good food habits start early

Eating patterns, as well as the type of food and drink that you give your child are very important. The risk of tooth decay can increase if your child eats too often during the day. Sugary food, such as biscuits, lollies and cakes as well as sugary drinks, such as soft drink and fruit juice, have been known to cause tooth decay.

If your child uses a dummy, make sure that it is not dipped in anything sweet, such as honey, as this will also cause tooth decay.

## How to prevent tooth decay

Tooth decay can be prevented by following these tips:

### 1. Clean your child's teeth

As soon as your child's teeth appear you should clean them by using a wet cloth to wipe the teeth.

As they get more teeth, you can gradually use a small, soft children's toothbrush to clean their teeth.



It is important that twice daily toothbrushing, with an age appropriate toothpaste becomes part of your child's daily routine, much like taking a bath or brushing hair. Starting early sets up good habits for life.

### 2. Use a children's fluoride toothpaste

Using a fluoride toothpaste twice a day is one of the most proven ways for you and your child to stay decay free.

Fluoride in toothpaste makes teeth more resistant to the acids produced after eating or drinking. It is important to use a pea size amount of a children's toothpaste and this should be placed on the brush by an adult. Always remember to store toothpaste out of the reach of children.





### 3. Give teeth a rest

Saliva is the body's natural defence against tooth decay. It works by helping to wash away acids and also contains minerals that can help repair teeth. It's important to try and limit the amount of time that your child snacks during the day and to encourage healthy snacking options. Taking a break from eating and drinking gives saliva a chance to work.

### 4. Take a peek and "lift the lip"

Parents are encouraged to look in their child's mouth regularly. Gently lift the lip and look for any white spots at the gumline, particularly on the upper front teeth. These white spots may be a sign of early tooth decay. If you find any white spots, it's important that you seek advice from your dental professional.

Early visits to your dental professional are important. If you can take your child for a check up around their first birthday, this can prevent any little problems from becoming big ones.

By following these simple tips you can help your child have a smile that lasts a lifetime!

Always read the label. Use only as directed. See your health care professional if symptoms persist.  
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