

Every baby is different. Generally, teeth start appearing between 4 and 7 months of age. Healthy teeth are important to your baby's overall health. Teeth help your baby chew food and form words and sounds when speaking. They also affect the way your baby's jaw grows.

Care of Your Baby's Teeth



You should be checking your baby's mouth on a periodic basis even before the first tooth erupts. This will give you an idea of the normal appearance of your baby's mouth. Teething may be preceded by whining, crying, or drooling more than usual. Other common signs of teething are changes in feeding habits, trouble in sleeping, and increased irritability. If your baby's gums are red and swollen or if you can see or feel the tip of the tooth, teething probably is causing these changes in your baby's behavior. However, if your baby also has a fever or a rash or is vomiting, something else may be wrong.

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Your baby will have a strong urge to chew at this time and should be given a teething ring, or dry toast to chew on. Babies will vary in their need for help at this time. Check with your baby's doctor or dentist before using any of the commercial preparations to ease teething discomfort. To help soothe your baby's gums, wipe a dampened gauze pad over them, two or three times a day.

After your baby's teeth begin to appear, clean them daily with a dampened gauze pad or clean washcloth until your baby is old enough to begin using a toothbrush. When your baby is one and a half to two years old, purchase a child-sized toothbrush. At least

BABY GIFTS & GIFT BASKETS

Giving your baby a cold teething ring or a cold washcloth to chew or suck on may help the pain with they start coming in. Teething gels should be used carefully because too much is not good for your baby.

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once a day-preferably after meals-let your child "brush" her own teeth; this will consist mainly of chewing on the toothbrush. At this age, make no attempt to try to teach your child tooth brushing techniques. It is more important to establish a pattern of dental care, and even chewing on a toothbrush helps clean the teeth.

Never give your baby a bottle of milk, juice, or a sweetened beverage when you put her to bed, and never put honey, syrup, or another sweetening agent on your baby's pacifier. These practices may help comfort your baby, but they can cause severe destruction of your baby's teeth. Nursing decay syndrome, or nursing or nursing bottle caries [dental cavities], can result from such practices. When your baby is awake and sucking on a bottle, the liquid is rapidly diluted with saliva and swallowed. However, if your baby falls asleep while nursing and swallows less often, the bacteria normally present in her mouth have time to turn to sugars in these liquids into acids

that attack the tooth enamel. Sweetening agents on a pacifier also permits the sugars to remain in the mouth too long. The teeth most severely damaged are the upper incisors, and it has been necessary to remove teeth destroyed by this type of decay in children as young as eighteen months old.

Other practices that are just as destructive are putting sugar in a piece of cloth and using this as a pacifier or using a piece of bread as a pacifier. The starches in the bread are quickly converted to sugars in the mouth, which can then serve as a food source for decay-causing bacteria.

Dental decay is the most common diseases affecting children, and it is the most preventable. Eating a well balanced diet low in sugars, drinking fluoridated water or using fluoride supplements, tooth brushing after meals, and visiting the dentist at recommended intervals can help prevent most caries or catch decay at an early stage. Caries in the primary teeth must be taken care of to relieve your child's pain and to help maintain the teeth until they are ready to be replaced by the permanent teeth.

Inflamed, bleeding gums are not normal but are a sign of dental problems. Even a young child can have gum disease, which needs the attention of a dentist. Dental decay in primary teeth or gum disease that is not taken care of can lead to infection or other problems that mat affect the permanent teeth,

Young children exploring their world by crawling, toddling, and attempting to stand alone may fall or bump into things that may injure their teeth and mouths. Any mouth injury that results in excessive bleeding or a chipped, loose, or

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displaced tooth needs to be evaluated by a dentist. If a tooth is knocked out, put the tooth in a cup of water and take it and your child to the dentist as soon as possible.

Thumb sucking is a natural and satisfying behavior for babies and young children. Most children outgrow this activity by four or five years of age. It should not be a cause for concern in young children.