

# Your Child's Teeth from Birth to Age 6



To give your child a healthy start in life, it's important to take care of his or her teeth and gums. Dental health is a big part of total health. If a child gets dental disease that is not treated, he or she can suffer serious health problems.

You can protect your child from dental disease with daily cleanings, regular dental visits and good nutrition. Children learn healthy habits from their parents and caregivers. This brochure will give you simple steps to help your child have a lifelong healthy smile.

Produced in cooperation with the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry

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## Baby's First Teeth

Your child's baby teeth help your child chew and speak normally. They also hold space in the jaws for the adult teeth that come in later. Starting infants with good oral care can help protect their teeth for decades to come.

A baby's teeth start to come in (erupt) when the baby is about six months old. By age three, most children have a full set of 20 primary teeth. Baby teeth will later be lost (shed) as your child develops and grows. This makes space for adult (permanent) teeth, which begin to come in around age 6. By the age of 21, a person usually has all of their adult teeth.

The chart below tells the names of baby (primary) teeth. It also shows when each tooth usually erupts and is shed. However, not all children get the same teeth at the same times. Your child's teeth may erupt earlier or later than shown here.

### Primary Teeth

Upper Teeth	Erupt	Shed
Central incisor	8-12 mos.	6-7 yrs.
Lateral incisor	9-13 mos.	7-8 yrs.
Canine (cuspid)	16-22 mos.	10-12 yrs.
First molar	13-19 mos.	9-11 yrs.
Second molar	25-33 mos.	10-12 yrs.

Lower Teeth	Erupt	Shed
Second molar	23-31 mos.	10-12 yrs.
First molar	14-18 mos.	9-11 yrs.
Canine (cuspid)	17-23 mos.	9-12 yrs.
Lateral incisor	10-16 mos.	7-8 yrs.
Central incisor	6-10 mos.	6-7 yrs.

## Teething Tips

As teeth begin to erupt, some babies may have sore or tender gums. Rubbing your child's gums with a clean wet gauze or finger may help. A clean, chilled teething ring—don't dip it in sugar, syrup, honey or other foods—may also ease tender gums. If the child is still cranky and uncomfortable while teething, consult your pediatrician.

## Prevent Cavities

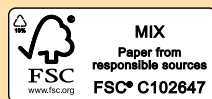
Tooth decay can begin as soon as a baby's teeth come in. Decay in baby teeth can lead to cavities and cause pain. Left untreated, it can destroy the teeth of an infant or young child. Tooth decay can also have an effect on a child's general health. He or she may have difficulty eating, resulting in poor nutrition.

Babies have a higher risk for decay if their teeth are in contact with sugary liquids often or for long periods of time. These liquids include fruit juice, soda and other sweetened liquids. Bacteria in the mouth feed on the sugar in these drinks. The bacteria release acids that can attack teeth and cause cavities.

Never put your baby to bed with a bottle or use a bottle as a pacifier. If your child uses a pacifier, don't dip it in sugar or honey, or put it in your mouth before giving it to the child. It's important to know that the cavity-causing bacteria in your mouth can be given to your baby.

Sippy cups or "no-spill" cups should only be used until around a child's first birthday. After that, try to get your child to drink from a small open cup.

Healthy eating habits also include a diet with plenty of vegetables, fruits and whole grains. Always serve nutritious snacks and limit sweets to mealtimes.



## Decay in Primary (Baby) Teeth



Healthy baby teeth



Moderate decay



Moderate to severe decay



Severe decay

## Cleaning Your Child's Teeth

### Good news: Tooth decay can be prevented.

Cleaning your child's teeth is an important step toward preventing cavities. Cleaning also helps remove plaque (sounds like PLAK), a sticky film of bacteria that builds up on teeth.

After each feeding, wipe the baby's gums with a clean, damp gauze pad or washcloth. This will remove plaque and bits of food that can harm erupting teeth. When your child's teeth begin to erupt, brush them gently with a child-sized toothbrush. If your child is not yet two years old, talk to your dentist or pediatrician before using toothpaste with fluoride (sounds like FLOOR-ide).



The ADA recommends that you use a pea-sized amount of toothpaste with fluoride for children under 6 years. Be sure your child spits out the toothpaste.

Use a child-sized toothbrush and replace it when it is worn, about every three months. Brush your child's teeth until he or she is at least six years old.

## Tips for proper brushing:

- Position your child so you can see into the mouth easily. You might want to sit, resting his or her head in your lap.
- Place the toothbrush against the gums.
- Move the brush back and forth gently in short (tooth-wide) strokes. Brush the outer surfaces of each tooth, upper and lower. Repeat the same method in the inside surfaces and chewing surfaces of the teeth.
- Finish by brushing the tongue to help freshen breath and remove bacteria.

Begin using floss when your child has two teeth that touch. Flossing removes plaque between the teeth.

## Tips for proper flossing:

- Use about a foot and a half of floss. Wind most of it around the middle fingers of both hands. Hold the floss between the thumbs and forefingers. Use a gentle, back-and-forth motion to guide the floss between the teeth.
- Curve the floss into a C-shape and guide it into the space between the gum and tooth until you feel resistance. Gently scrape the floss against the side of the tooth.
- Repeat these steps on each tooth. Don't forget the backs of the last teeth in each corner of the mouth.

Flossing is not easy for a child. You should floss your child's teeth until he or she can do it alone, usually around age 10 or 11. Every child is different, however. Your dentist and hygienist can show you how to floss.



Brushing



Flossing

## Fluoride

**Fluoride is a mineral that is very effective in protecting teeth from decay.** When a child's teeth are still forming, fluoride works by making tooth enamel more resistant to the acid that causes tooth decay. Fluoride also helps repair areas where the acid attacks have already begun.

Children can get added protection from fluoride if they get it from more than one source. Fluorides may be found in toothpastes, mouth rinses and professional fluoride applied in the dental office. People can also get fluoride from fluoridated tap water or from fluoride tablets, drops or lozenges. If you are not sure if your tap water has fluoride, ask your dentist.

Most bottled water does not contain fluoride. So children who regularly drink bottled water or unfluoridated tap water may be missing the benefits of fluoride. Check the bottle water label to see if fluoride has been added.

Breast milk is widely considered the most complete form of nutrition for infants. If you use formula to feed your baby, ask your pediatrician, family physician or dentist about the best water to use.

## Sucking Habits

Many infants and young children like to suck on thumbs, fingers and pacifiers. Sucking is a natural reflex that may make them feel safe, happy and relaxed. However, **in some cases a child's sucking habits can cause problems with tooth alignment and the proper growth of the mouth.**

Sucking habits usually stop between the ages of two and four. If your child uses a pacifier or sucks his or her fingers, talk to your dentist about how to wean your child of this habit. Pacifiers should not be used after age two, and finger or thumb sucking should end by age four.

## First Dental Visit

As soon as your child's first tooth appears, schedule his first dental visit. Treat the first visit as you would a well-baby checkup with the child's pediatrician. **It's a good idea to have the first dental visit within six months after the first tooth appears, but no later than your child's first birthday.** It's best to meet the dentist when your child is having no dental problems—don't wait until an emergency comes up.

Having a well-baby checkup at this age connects your child to a dental home. This is a "home base" for dental care, a place where you can take your child from year to year. This helps the dentist get to know your child's and your family's specific needs, so he or she can provide the best care.

**During the first visit, your child's dentist can do several things, such as:**

- learn your child's health history
- give a complete oral exam to check growth and development, oral hygiene, injuries, cavities or other problems
- tell you if your child is at risk of developing tooth decay
- clean the teeth and provide tips for daily care
- find out whether your child is getting enough fluoride to prevent cavities
- review feeding practices that may lead to tooth decay
- discuss teething, pacifier use, or finger/thumb sucking habits
- talk with you about common dental injuries and what to do if one happens
- discuss treatment if needed and schedule the next check-up

Teaching children the importance of good oral care early is a great way to set healthy habits for life. Dental disease is almost entirely preventable, and untreated dental disease can lead to serious health problems. **Keep your child healthy by brushing his or her teeth twice a day, flossing once a day and by visiting the dentist regularly.**