

Infant Dental Care

Your baby's teeth... what you need to know

INFANT DENTAL CARE STARTS WITH MOM

It's important for pregnant women to have a complete dental exam, and to treat any cavities or gum disease as soon as possible.

Because baby teeth begin to form before birth, your child's dental care begins with your healthy pregnancy. While you are pregnant, be sure to eat a well-balanced, nutritious diet filled with plenty of vitamins and minerals.

TEETHING

Children have their own schedule for teething. In general, children begin teething at about six months, and most "baby" teeth are present by three years of age.

Although many babies have no teething issues, some can have discomfort, and may be fussy. Many times, allowing a child to chew on a clean, chilled teething ring or wet face cloth helps baby to feel better. Teething cookies and biscuits can stick to your baby's teeth and cause tooth decay, so avoid using these products.

If your baby has a fever or diarrhea while teething, treat the illness like you would at any other time; these things are not caused by teething.



STARTING DENTAL CHECKS

At about six months of age, your healthcare provider should assess the likelihood of your child having future dental issues. This may include reviewing your dental history and requiring you to have a dental exam. If your provider thinks your child may have issues, be sure to see a dentist right away. It is recommended that children begin regularly seeing a dentist by their second birthday.

BRUSHING AND FLOSSING



Once teeth appear, it is important to make a habit of cleaning them twice a day. Gently clean your baby's mouth using a soft toothbrush. Lift the lip so you can see along the gum line when cleaning. Also, be sure to clean your child's mouth after the last feeding of the day.

Your child can learn to brush his or her teeth around three years of age. By age four, kids should be brushing their own teeth morning and night. Parents should still continue to check the child's teeth after they have finished brushing.

Start flossing your child's teeth as soon as they touch each other. Talk to your dentist about the right timing and technique to floss your child's teeth, as well as how to teach your child to floss.

DISCLOSING TABLETS

When your child is older, use disclosing tablets from time to time to see if any plaque is left on teeth after brushing. Disclosing tablets are chewable and will color any plaque left on teeth after the child brushes. You can buy these at most drug stores.



EARLY CHILDHOOD TOOTH DECAY

Tooth decay is caused by bacteria in the mouth. Your baby's teeth can start to decay the first day they appear. Decay often begins along the gum line behind the top front teeth, making it hard to see. The decay can spread to the front of these teeth, and can often impact all of your baby's teeth.

PREVENTING TOOTH DECAY

Parents and caregivers often share spoons, forks and other utensils with babies. The saliva you may leave behind on the utensil contains bacteria that can cause tooth decay. To avoid spreading bacteria to your child, do not share toothbrushes, lick pacifiers to clean them, or test baby's food with a spoon you put into your mouth.

When feeding from a bottle, do not prop the bottle up in your child's mouth, and do not put your baby to bed with a bottle of milk, formula, juice or other product that contains sugar. The sugar and acids in these liquids can cause tooth decay as well. Also, remove the bottle as soon as baby is done feeding, and encourage your child to begin drinking from a cup around nine months of age.

Keep your child away from cigarette smoke (secondhand smoke). Tobacco smoke may contribute to the development of tooth decay, gum disease and many other health issues.

FLUORIDE

Discuss your child's fluoride needs with your healthcare provider. If you have a well or use bottled water to drink or cook with, you may obtain a prescription for fluoride, or brush your teeth with a fluoride toothpaste. Your child should be at least six months of age before using a fluoride supplement. If you are a WIC client, the Public Health Department can supply you with the supplement.