

LOOKING AFTER YOUR CHILD'S TEETH

0 - 8 YEARS



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive



This booklet answers some of the most frequently asked questions about your child's teeth.

Produced by the Oral Health Promoters, Dental Service, H.S.E. (South Western Area)

Q

When will my baby's teeth appear?

A

The first tooth normally appears when the baby is about 6 months old.



- The front four teeth (two on the top and two on the bottom) are the first to appear, at about **six months**.
- By the time your child is **2 1/2 years** of age, most of their first teeth have appeared.
- There are 20 baby teeth in total (ten on top and ten on bottom).
- Remember that adult (permanent) teeth appear at the back of the mouth, behind the baby teeth, when the child is about **6 years** of age.

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Are baby teeth important?

A

Yes, baby teeth are important for the following reasons:



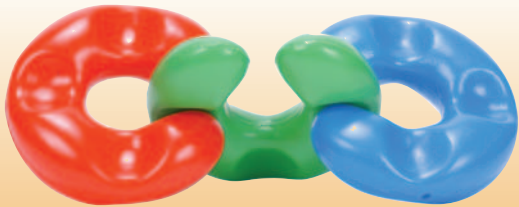
- They help a child to bite and chew food.
- They act as a guide for the adult teeth - some baby teeth are not lost until the child is 11 or 12 years old.
- They help a child to develop speech.
- Healthy baby teeth are important for a child's self-confidence and smile.

Q

Is teething a problem?

A

Some children do have teething problems, including:



- red and swollen gums
- red cheeks
- dribbling
- disturbed sleep

Certain teething rings that may help can be cooled in the fridge. Massaging gums may also help.

Teething may not **always** be to blame for the above symptoms.

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When should I start cleaning my baby's teeth?

A

Cleaning should start as soon as the first tooth appears.



- Use a small **soft** toothbrush and **tap water**.
Toothpaste is not recommended for children under two years of age.
- Children over two years may use a **pea-sized** amount of fluoride **toothpaste**.
- Parents should **supervise** brushing in children under seven years and **avoid** toothpaste being **swallowed**.
- Teeth should be cleaned in the **morning** and at **bed time**.
- **Change** your child's toothbrush every three months or when the bristles get ragged.

Q

Is diet important for healthy teeth?

A

Yes, good dental habits begun early in life can keep teeth strong and healthy and provide a good start for adult teeth.



- It's not the amount of sugar in food or drink that causes damage to childrens' teeth, it's the **number** of **times** they have sugar.
- Keep sugary foods and drinks to **meal times** only - avoid snacks containing sugar between meals.
- **Healthy** snack options include fresh fruit, vegetables, plain yoghurts, cheese and bread.
- **Milk** and **water** are the most tooth-friendly drinks. Keep all fruit juices and squashes to meal times only.
- Other kinds of sugar harmful to teeth include glucose, maltose and sucrose, so check the label.
- 'Low sugar' or 'no added sugar' labels do **not** mean the food or drink is sugar-free.
- Choose sugar-free medicines when you can.

Q

What is baby bottle / nursing decay?

A

When fizzy drinks, juices, milk or breast milk are in constant contact with a baby's teeth, the teeth can decay, as shown in the picture.



Picture courtesy of the Dental Health Foundation



- Don't let your child sleep with a bottle or feeder in his/her mouth.
- From your child's first birthday, encourage him/her to drink from a beaker or cup.
- Breast-feeding is beneficial for your child's development. Try to breast-feed at routine intervals. Even breast milk in constant contact with a baby's teeth can cause decay.
- Never dip a soother in sugar, honey or anything sweet before giving it to your child.
- Do not forget to brush the teeth after the last feed of the day.

Q

Can thumb-sucking or sucking soothers cause problems?

A

Yes, some children suck their thumbs very hard and this can pull their teeth out of line.



- Babies like to suck for comfort.
- Long-term sucking of thumbs or soothers can affect the position of the teeth.
- Encourage your child to stop thumb-sucking by school age.
- Never dip a soother in sugar, honey or anything sweet before giving it to your child.

Q

What should I do if my child bangs his/her teeth or mouth?

A

Bring your child to a dentist if his/her teeth are accidentally banged or damaged.

If any **adult** tooth is knocked out, follow these simple steps quickly:

- Find the tooth.
- Put it back in the socket if you can.
- If this is not possible place it in a cup of cold milk. Don't wash it.
- Go to your dentist immediately.



