

## **Advice On Your Baby's Teeth**

### **When Will My Baby's Teeth Come Through?**

A baby's first teeth usually start to appear from about 6 months and continue until all 20 primary (or milk teeth) are through around the age of 2 ½. Second teeth usually come through between the ages of about 6 and 14 years.

### **Is Teething Painful?**

As the tooth breaks through the gum, most babies feel discomfort and even pain. They tend to dribble more than usual, have flushed cheeks, restlessness, disturbed sleep and may chew or bite on hard surfaces. A range of teething gels, powders and rings can help, as can crunchy foods like cucumber, kept cool in the fridge. Sugar-free Calpol can also be a great help.

### **When Should I Start Cleaning My Baby's Teeth?**

Once teeth start to come through, you should start to clean them. Make toothbrushing a part of your baby's daily routine, using a baby toothbrush and a tiny smear of fluoride toothpaste. Cuddle the baby in a firm 'headlock' on your lap, facing a mirror and looking over his/her shoulder. Gently massage around the teeth and gums. Babies enjoy this and will gradually want to do it themselves. As they grow older, more responsibility can be given to them, but children cannot be expected to clean their own teeth thoroughly until about the age of 6, so should be assisted by an adult.

### **Does Thumb/Finger Sucking Or Dummy Sucking Affect The Way The Teeth Develop?**

In babies, thumb or dummy sucking does no long-term harm, but if the habit persists to school age when adult teeth come through, the shape of the mouth can be permanently altered. Try to encourage your child to give up the dummy or thumb sucking gradually. Never dip a dummy or comforter into syrups, honey or fruit juice, as this will encourage decay.

### **What Should I Feed My Baby To Avoid Decay?**

As soon as the gum surface breaks, your baby's teeth will be at risk of decay. This occurs when bacteria feed on carbohydrates, especially sugars, in the mouth to make acid, which attacks the surface enamel. The baby needs sugars for energy and growth, and these are present in both breast and formula milk. They are also present in many foods, including fruits, while many desserts, baby foods and cereals contain added sugar. Read labels thoroughly for hidden sugars and restrict foods with added sugars to mealtimes only. Do not give high sugar snacks.

Ideally, give your baby only water and milk to drink. If used, dilute 'baby juices' with extra water and keep them to mealtimes. Choose sugar-free medicines where possible.

### **Should I Use A Bottle Or A Cup?**

It is recommended that a baby should be introduced to drinking from a cup from 6 months, and discouraged from using a bottle from the age of 1 year. Never allow your baby to fall asleep with a bottle and do not use bottles or beakers as comforters, as this increases the time the teeth are exposed to sugars.

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### How Soon Should I Take My Baby To The Dentist?

Let your baby come with you for your routine check-ups, to help them become familiar with the surgery and the staff. Your dentist can give you advice on caring for your baby's teeth and suggest when they can start having check-ups themselves. This is usually when you can count 20 teeth and your baby will let you look in his/her mouth.

### Should My Baby Have A Fluoride Supplement?

Fluoride helps strengthen teeth, but too much can cause brown staining (fluorosis). Some areas have fluoride added in the water supply, so discuss with your dentist whether fluoride supplements are necessary for your child.

### What If My Baby Damages A Tooth?

Most minor chips or knocks do not need treatment, but if there is any major trauma or dislodgement, seek immediate help from your dentist.