

Your child's teeth



Teeth help your child chew and speak. Baby teeth also hold a spot for permanent teeth to come in.

TEETHING

Teething babies may be fussy, drool, and want to chew.¹ If you want to let your child chew on a teething ring, go for one that is hard and solid.^{1,2}

Steer clear of teething products that have benzocaine in them. The US Food and Drug Administration warns that benzocaine can make your baby very sick and may even cause death.³

CAVITIES

To reduce your child's risk of cavities, help him or her

- brush twice a day with a fluoride-containing toothpaste;
- use fluoride;
- limit sugary snacks and drinks.

Toothbrushing

You can start brushing your child's teeth twice a day when the first tooth comes in. For children younger than 3 years, use no more than a smear of toothpaste about the size of a grain of rice. Children older than 3 years can use a drop of toothpaste about the size of a pea.

You'll need to brush younger children's teeth for them. Older children may be able to handle toothbrushing themselves, but watch to make sure they use the right amount of toothpaste and spit out as much as possible.⁴

Fluoride

Fluoride keeps the outside layer of teeth strong. Using fluoridated toothpaste is 1 way to take advantage of fluoride. Having your child drink fluoridated water is good, too. Fluoridated water is public water with enough fluoride to help keep teeth healthy. Your dentist may be able to help you find out if your water is fluoridated. If it is not, he or she may recommend fluoride tablets or drops to help your child get the most benefit from fluoride.

Limiting sugary snacks and drinks

Teeth are covered with a thin, sticky film of bacteria, which produces acid when exposed to sugar. It is this acid that causes cavities.

Drinks are the largest source of sugar in the American diet.⁵ Juices, for example, can contain sugar. The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests avoiding juice for the first year.⁶

The pediatrics group also says children should not sip on juice throughout the day or go to bed with juice. These behaviors increase the risk of tooth decay.⁷

VISIT THE DENTIST

Take your baby to see the dentist sometime after the first tooth comes in but before his or her first birthday.

The dentist may

- perform an oral examination;
- assess your child's risk of tooth decay;
- check to see that the teeth are developing on schedule;
- identify whether any habits like thumb sucking or pacifier use are affecting your child's oral development.⁸

CONCLUSION

Take care of your child's teeth from the time the first tooth comes in to help get him or her started on the path to good oral health. ■

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adaj.2018.11.009>

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Disclosure. Ms. Mark did not report any disclosures.

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"For the Patient" provides general information on dental treatments. It is designed to prompt discussion between dentist and patient about treatment options and does not substitute for the dentist's professional assessment based on the individual patient's needs and desires.

You can find more information for patients at ADACatalog.org or at MouthHealthy.org.

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