

The Mouths of Babes



Something to Smile About!



Gerber[®]

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Introduction

From the very first hours of life, a baby's mouth is important for healthy growth and development. Babies obviously rely on their mouths for nutrition, but they also use them to learn about the world around them. As they grow babies will put things into their mouths to explore them – first their own fist and hands, and later just about any toy or object within reach!



Even though baby teeth are eventually replaced by permanent teeth, it is important to keep them clean and healthy. If a baby's first teeth are lost too soon due to cavities or trauma, the remaining teeth may shift and cause adult teeth to come in crooked. Also, establishing good dental care habits at a young age encourages children to take good care of their teeth as they grow older.

This booklet offers practical suggestions for keeping your baby's smile healthy and bright. If you have any questions at all, talk with your pediatric dentist or health professional.

Teething

Your baby's first tooth will likely appear between five and eight months of age. Some babies, however, are born with a tooth or two, while others keep their toothless grin until their first birthday.

The lower front teeth usually come in first and the upper front teeth shortly after. Others will follow in clusters, until all 20 primary teeth have erupted around your child's second or third birthday.

Teething is a difficult time for babies and their parents because cutting teeth can make a baby

irritable or fussy. You can help soothe your baby's painful, swollen gums with a chillable teether or gum massager.

While babies are teething, they often rub hard smooth toys – or nubby ones – against their gums. They may also suck their thumb or pacifier and drool more than usual. These are all normal signs of teething. However, if your baby's discomfort includes a fever, diarrhea, vomiting or rashes, check with your doctor. Something other than teething may be causing your baby's illness.



Tip

Keep two or three teething rings on hand. That way, you can always have one cooling in the refrigerator.

Taking Care of First Teeth



As soon as your baby's first tooth appears, it's time to begin routine dental care. The Gerber® Finger Toothbrush and Gum Massager helps remove food and plaque and helps soothe teething gums. Laying your baby across your lap or on the changing table will keep your baby secure and give you a good view of all the teeth as you brush.

As your baby gets older, she will probably want to brush her own teeth just like you do. Go ahead and encourage her. Most young children, though, do not have the motor skills to do a good enough job. You will still need to brush them again afterward to make sure they are cleaned well. By age 5 or 6, your child can take over daily tooth brushings, but an adult should still supervise.

Is Your Baby at Risk?

The enamel on first teeth begins forming even before babies are born. A diet rich in calcium and vitamin D during pregnancy strengthens a baby's tooth enamel and reduces the risk for early childhood tooth decay. If you are pregnant, talk with your doctor or dentist about protecting your baby's teeth.

A Formula for Tooth Decay

Type of Food + Form + Time on Teeth = Tooth Decay
(Sugars or Starches) (Sticky) (Long Period)

Cavities:

Foods that Cause Them, Foods that Prevent Them

Tip

According to two university studies, the bacteria that cause cavities are transmitted through a mother's saliva to her baby while doing such things as sharing utensils. You can help reduce your baby's risk of cavities by brushing your own teeth well after meals and snacks and visiting the dentist regularly.

Foods that stick to the teeth feed bacteria in the mouth, producing an acid that causes cavities. Any food that contains carbohydrates, either sugars (dried fruit, candy, rolled fruit snacks) or cooked starches (breads, potatoes, pasta, rice), can feed the bacteria. Which is why brushing or rinsing your mouth after eating these types of foods is important.

Some foods are “anticavity” foods. They make teeth stronger and more resistant to decay. These foods are good sources of calcium, phosphorus and vitamin D, like dairy products. Some aged cheeses, like cheddar, Monterey Jack, and Swiss, also seem to have additional cavity protection.

Saliva also helps prevent cavities because it helps rinse sticky carbohydrates from the mouth. So drinking plenty of fluids and eating foods with high water content, like raw fruits and vegetables, is also important for healthy teeth.

Between-meal snacks are more likely to cause cavities because they are usually sticky foods, eaten in a hurry, and without liquids to help rinse the teeth. When brushing is not possible, serve snacks that breakdown quickly and don't stick to the teeth – like apples, carrots, celery with cheese, yogurt, and frozen fruit bars.



Early Childhood Tooth Decay

Some babies and young children have severe tooth decay at a very early age. Sometimes these early cavities are called “nursing caries” or “baby bottle tooth decay.” They usually happen when milk or other beverages are allowed to pool around the teeth for long periods of time. Here’s how you can keep your baby’s teeth healthy:

- 1) *Hold your baby in your arms during milk feedings.* Don’t ever prop your baby’s bottle.
- 2) *Don’t put your baby to bed with a bottle.* If your baby needs soothing at bedtime, try pacifiers, quiet music, or gentle rocking instead.
- 3) *Never dip pacifiers in sweetened substances or liquids to encourage sucking.* There is no need to do this. Babies naturally want to suck. You would only be increasing your baby’s risk of early childhood caries.
- 4) *Begin weaning to a cup around 6 months of age.* Wean your baby completely from the bottle by her first birthday.
- 5) *Bottles are for mealtimes.* Don’t allow your baby to crawl around or play with a bottle in her mouth.
- 6) *Begin routine fluoride supplements.* Fluoride supplements are needed beginning at 6 months of age if your baby is breast fed or not drinking formula made with fluoridated water.
- 7) *Begin brushing your baby’s teeth as soon as they come in.*
- 8) *Call a pediatric dentist to schedule an oral health assessment between 12 and 18 months of age.*

Fluoride:

An Ounce of Prevention

Tip

Your water at home may be fluoridated, but another home that your baby spends time at – like grandma's or a babysitter's – might not be. Be sure to ask.

Tip

Swallowing too much fluoride may cause enamel fluorosis, white streaks or pitting on the surface of the tooth. Before brushing the teeth of a child under 2 years with a fluoridated toothpaste or allowing children under 6 years to use a fluoride rinse, talk with a pediatric dentist.

Fluoride is a mineral that strengthens tooth enamel and greatly reduces the risk of cavities. Systemic fluoride (fluoridated water and sodium fluoride drops that your doctor may prescribe) strengthens the enamel while the teeth are still under the gums. Topical fluoride (fluoride toothpastes, drops, lozenges, mouth rinses and professional applications by dental professionals) strengthens tooth enamel once the teeth have come in.

Babies do not need fluoride supplements during the first six months of life. Talk with your doctor about fluoride supplements if you are breastfeeding beyond six months or if your baby is bottle feeding and your community water supply is not fluoridated. Also, fluoride supplements may be needed if you use a home water filtering system or your family drinks bottled water. Your doctor can prescribe the right fluoride dose for your baby.



Gerber® Tooth and Gum Cleanser is fluoride free and safe for babies age three months and older.

Sucking

Moments after birth, babies know how to suckle a breast or bottle. It's nature's way of ensuring their survival. Sucking is also an enjoyable and healthy activity for babies. You'll notice how relaxed and happy your baby is while nursing.

Non-Nutritive Sucking

In addition to sucking for nutrition, babies also suck for other reasons. This is called “non-nutritive” sucking. You'll see it when your baby is not hungry, but continues to nurse, or suck fingers, clothing, toys, a pacifier – anything that is handy.



During the first six months of life, this kind of sucking is as important to your baby's development as learning to crawl or walk. That's because babies also use their mouths to entertain themselves, to exercise, and to explore the world around them. Sucking can also comfort your baby after a fright, soothe minor pain, and aid growth and development.

During the second half of the first year, pacifier or thumb sucking is still helpful for soothing older babies when they cry or to calm them during times of stress. But, as babies grow and become more mobile and social, they need to expand their play and spend time exploring their surroundings without a pacifier or thumb in their mouth.

Weaning Your Child

From the Pacifier or Thumb

Many children give up the thumb or pacifier on their own or can be coaxed to with gentle reminders. If the habit continues beyond age 5, your child may need your help to stop.

Pick a time when your child is not sick, unhappy, or coping with new stresses. In a very loving and supportive way, talk about how she is a big girl now and doesn't need to suck her thumb or pacifier anymore. Show her what thumb sucking is doing to her body – causing a gap between her upper and lower teeth and creating a callous on her thumb.

Then, pick a date that is no further than 30 days away. A birthday or holiday works best. Have your child agree that this will be the last day for thumb or pacifier sucking. Reminders from time to time will help reinforce the commitment. Then, the night before the big day, have your child place the pacifier under her pillow so the “tooth fairy” can take it away and replace it with a special treat or prize.

Obviously, the tooth fairy cannot replace a thumb, but you can still tell your child that this will be the last day for thumb sucking and celebrate with a treat or prize. If needed, have your child put a band-aid over her thumb as a gentle reminder, especially at night when thumb sucking is difficult to control.

Does Sucking Cause Crooked Teeth?

Usually sucking has little effect on a baby's primary teeth and jaw position – unless the habit continues as permanent teeth are coming in. “Non-nutritive” sucking is important for your baby's normal growth and development. So there's no need to discourage it until the risks outweigh the benefits, which rarely happens before age four.

The First Visit to the Dentist

If your baby's teeth are coming in normally, and you have no questions or concerns about her teeth and gums, you can wait to schedule her first appointment with the dentist between your child's first and third birthdays. By that time, all twenty of her baby teeth should be in. Up until that time, your health professional should be able to monitor your child's oral health at regularly scheduled well-child check ups.

Tip

If you have questions about your baby's teeth, check with your health care provider, or call the American Academy of Pediatric Dentists (312-337-2169). They can refer you to a pediatric dentist in your area.

During the first dental appointment, your child's teeth will be examined to be sure that they are coming in normally and that there are no other dental problems. Eating, cleaning, and sucking habits will also be reviewed, as well as any facial trauma your child may have experienced. If you live in an area that does not have fluoridated water, the dentist may apply a topical fluoride solution or prescribe fluoride drops or chewable tablets for your child to take at home. The hygienist will show your child how to take good care of her teeth. The timing of future appointments will be based on your child's risk for dental disease.

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Four generations of parents have trusted Gerber® to provide nutrition for their babies. Now we're doing even more. We've put everything we've learned about babies into our new, carefully developed Wellness products. From calming and soothing your baby before bedtime, to cleaning her first tooth. Look in the Gerber® aisle for all the new products to keep your Gerber® baby happy and healthy, inside and out.

