



Your Baby's Mouth

Member Resources – Oral Health

Healthy oral habits last a lifetime.

Our teeth are important even before we have them. That's why starting good bottle habits is the first important step in a lifetime of good oral health.

Baby teeth are at risk for decay from the moment they appear at about six months. They hold space in the jaw for the adult teeth that will replace them. When a tooth falls out too early, another may drift into the empty space, causing crooked or crowded teeth.

Baby Bottle Tooth Decay

Cavities in early childhood can cause tooth loss. Baby bottle tooth decay is the culprit. The name comes from the habit of putting babies to bed with a bottle to pacify them. While baby sleeps, sugary liquids (sweetened water, fruit juice, milk, formula, and even breast milk) pool around baby's mouth. Bacteria then feed on the sugars, producing tooth-eroding acids. Each time your baby drinks these liquids, acids attack for 20 minutes or longer. After several attacks, teeth can start to decay.¹

The upper front teeth are most at risk. Fluoride makes teeth more resistant to acids. So make sure your infants and toddlers get enough. You can do this by ensuring they drink fluoridated tap water. And brush their teeth with a fluoride toothpaste. Some decay can be so severe that teeth must be removed. But the good news is that tooth decay is almost completely preventable.¹

Baby's First Dental Visit

Dental visits can be easy for children. Starting them off with good oral hygiene habits can make visiting the dentist easy for adults, too. Here's what you'll talk about with the dentist:²

- Proper hygiene for baby's teeth and gums
- How to prevent cavities
- How much fluoride baby needs
- Thumb sucking and other oral habits
- Developmental milestones
- Teething
- Nutrition
- When to see the dentist

Some dentists like a six-month schedule. This helps children develop good habits. And it allows dentists to treat problems promptly.

Prevention

The following tips should give your baby's teeth a head start for a lifetime of smiles.^{3,4}

- Encourage healthy eating habits. A diet rich in vegetables, fruit, and whole grains is best for baby!
- Allow infants to finish bottles before napping or going to bed.
- Do not put any items from your own mouth into baby's mouth.
- Ensure that your child gets enough fluoride. Discuss their needs with your dentist or pediatrician.
- Brush children's teeth for them until they are six years old.
- Use clean, unflavored pacifiers; don't dip them in honey or sugar, and never clean them in your own mouth.
- Wipe baby's gums with a clean, damp cloth after each feeding. This helps remove plaque and food that can harm teeth.
- Schedule your child's first dental visit within six months of the first tooth's arrival and no later than their first birthday.
- Use bottles for breast milk, formula, or milk only. Avoid putting juice, sugar water, or soft drinks in your child's bottle.
- Use a pea-size amount of toothpaste after age two, when your child can be counted on to spit, not swallow, it.
- Brush any new teeth gently using just water and a child-size toothbrush.

Following these simple tips gets baby off to a good start. And don't forget your own oral health. Reducing the number of bacteria in your mouth benefits everyone.

1 <https://www.colgate.com/en-us/oral-health/life-stages/infant-oral-care/brushing-babys-first-teeth-0414>, accessed November 2018.

2 <https://www.webmd.com/oral-health/guide/childs-first-dental-visit#1>, accessed November 2018.

3 <https://www.verywellhealth.com/dental-hygiene-for-babies-1059041>, November 2019.

4 <https://www.webmd.com/parenting/baby/caring-babies-teeth#1>, accessed December 2019.

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