



Children's Health

Dental Care for Children

HOW TO PROMOTE GOOD ORAL HYGIENE

Not so long ago, a dental visit usually meant pain. Tooth care often consisted of waiting until a tooth caused discomfort and then having it pulled. Baby teeth were mistakenly viewed as unimportant because they would eventually fall out anyway.

It's now known that caring for baby teeth translates into caring for permanent teeth. Baby teeth serve as a guide for the proper positioning of permanent teeth. When they become decayed, the permanent teeth can also be affected. Premature loss of a baby tooth can cause overcrowding and developmental problems of the jaw and bite.

PROPER CARE FOR BABY TEETH

- ▶ Never let your child take a bottle of anything but water to bed. Sugar can pool on the teeth while the child is sleeping and cause tooth decay. Nursing a baby to sleep in the first year is fine. However, breast milk has a high sugar content.
- ▶ Schedule regular dental visits beginning with the eruption of the first tooth.
- ▶ Clean your baby's teeth daily with a clean washcloth. Until age 7 or 8, children usually don't have the dexterity needed to properly clean their teeth, so parents should help them.
- ▶ Flossing should begin as soon as your child has teeth.
- ▶ Always use a fluoride toothpaste, and always rinse thoroughly after brushing.
- ▶ Encourage your children to eat nutritious snacks of fruits and vegetables instead of candy or other sugary foods.
- ▶ In areas where fluoride is not added to drinking water, your child's doctor or dentist can prescribe fluoride drops and tablets for children age 3 and older.



TEETHING

The first teeth to erupt are the front teeth. They usually appear during the first year. The gums may be a little inflamed and there may be more drooling than usual. Your baby will probably chew on his or her fingers or other objects.

Minor changes in feeding, sleeping and bowel movements may also occur.

The first and second molars, erupting between ages 1 and 3, are more likely to cause problems. The gums may be tender and may make eating painful. Also, the cheek on the teething side of the mouth may be hot and flushed. The child will most likely be miserable for a few days. Rubbing the gums gently and offering cool drinks may ease the pain a little. You may also want to ask your child's doctor about available over-the-counter teething medications. In all, 20 baby teeth will emerge by age 2½.

WHEN THE BABY TEETH START TO GO

Around age 6, the permanent teeth begin coming in. Usually the permanent teeth will push the baby teeth out. On occasion, the baby tooth will still be present but loose when the permanent tooth erupts. The baby teeth will eventually be replaced by 32 permanent teeth, including the wisdom teeth that come in during young adulthood.

TRAUMA AND BRACES

If a tooth gets knocked loose, it should be preserved in milk and be taken with the child immediately to the dentist. When permanent teeth come in crooked, uneven or overcrowded, corrective measures may need to be taken. Orthodontic treatment (braces) is most effective when started between ages 10 and 13 and after the permanent teeth have come in.