

Visit the dentist for first check-up by age one

Taking your child to the dentist from a young age will give them the best chance of having healthy teeth and gums. They will get used to visiting the dentist and will find it a more pleasant experience than waiting to visit because of a painful tooth. You can check for signs of decay by lifting your child's top lip. If you notice any changes, white or brown marks or holes on their teeth, please see a dentist quickly because early stages of tooth decay can be reversed.



Visit the dentist



Lift and look

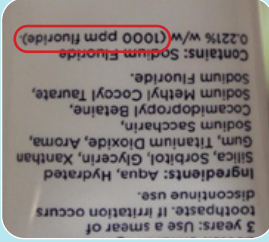
Cleaning your child's teeth 2 - 5 years of age

From 2 years of age start using fluoride toothpaste to help protect the teeth from tooth decay. Use a small pea-sized amount (at least 1000 parts per million (ppm) fluoride) twice a day. Help your child to spit out the toothpaste and avoid swallowing. Do not rinse after brushing to keep the fluoride in the mouth and on the teeth.



Brush every surface of every tooth especially where the teeth meet the gums and the biting surface of each tooth. As your child has many baby teeth now, brushing should take 2-3 minutes.

Younger children will still need an adult to brush their teeth until they are older. Generally, once a child can tie their own shoelaces, around 7 - 8 years of age, they can take over more of the brushing along with some parental supervision. You will still have to remind them to brush their teeth twice a day.



A pea sized amount of toothpaste



What is tooth decay and what causes it?

Tooth decay is caused by bacteria in the mouth found on teeth and gums. Bacteria eat sugars found in food and drinks, to form acid, which makes a hole in the tooth over time. Teeth can decay quickly if sugar is eaten often, and the teeth are not brushed. To prevent tooth decay, reduce the amount and how often your child eats sugary foods and drinks. Clean your baby's teeth very well twice a day to remove the bacteria on their teeth and gums. Use a fluoride toothpaste once your child is 2 years old as fluoride helps to make teeth stronger.



Tooth decay

Cleaning baby's teeth 0 - 2 years of age

Clean your baby's teeth and gums to remove bacteria and reduce their chances of getting tooth decay. After feeding and before bed, wipe gums with a clean damp soft cloth. When the first tooth appears (around 6 months) clean the teeth and gums with a small, soft toothbrush and water. Their teeth should be brushed twice daily, at night before bed and in the morning.



Wiping the gums

Toothpaste is not necessary for children under 2 years of age unless advised by your dentist. Babies and young children will need to have an adult brush their teeth. How long you spend brushing your baby's teeth is important. Make sure to brush every surface, of every tooth. Include the outside and inside of the teeth by the gums and the flat biting surface of each tooth. Lift your baby's lips out to brush the front teeth near the gums. As more baby teeth come in, it will take longer to brush, about 2 minutes. It may be easier to brush infant and toddler teeth with the child lying back on a bed and their chin lifted slightly up. This position is often more comfortable for the child and allows the parent to see the teeth better.

Caring for Your Child's Teeth

0-5 years of age

Strong baby teeth are a great start to your baby's overall health. They play a key role in how your child learns to chew, talk, and have a bright smile. Some baby teeth last 10 years. Taking care of your baby's gums and teeth is an important step to healthy teeth for life. This leaflet contains information to keep your child's teeth healthy.



DHF Dental Health Foundation Ireland

DHF Dental Health Foundation Ireland



For more information to keep your child's teeth healthy please see our FAQ section.

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Healthy Meals

The best meals for your baby are those made from simple fresh ingredients with no added sugar, or salt. Try to introduce a wide variety of healthy foods to your baby from 12 months onwards.

Some foods and drinks have added or hidden sugar that you may not be aware of. For example, tomato ketchup, pasta sauces, fruit yoghurts, fromage frais and some breakfast cereals. Always read the food ingredient label on the package.

The Food Pyramid for Children is a guide to foods to give your baby.



Healthier snacks and drinks from 6 months

Many processed foods (packaged) are high in sugar. Offering sweet snacks to your child can give them a 'sweet tooth' and may cause them to refuse healthier foods. Sweet drinks, for example, juices, drinks with added sugar, flavoured milk, flavoured water, sweetened yoghurts and fizzy drinks can damage your child's teeth. Dried fruits and honey are high in sugar and can stick to baby teeth. Reducing both the amount and the number of times your child has sugar throughout the day will help reduce the chance of your child getting tooth decay.

Healthier snack options for your child include wholemeal crackers, natural yoghurt, cheese, and fresh fruit and vegetables cut into safe size pieces. **It is best not to eat and drink all the time to give their teeth a break from food.**



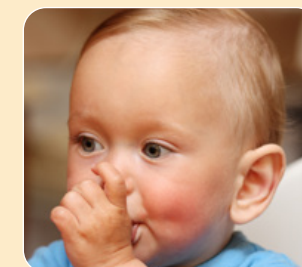
Soothers and thumb sucking habits



Not all babies need or want soothers. If you are breastfeeding your baby, ask a health professional for advice before giving your baby a soother especially in the first weeks of feeding.

It is advisable not to place the soother in your mouth before you give it to your baby. This is because you are sharing your bacteria especially if you have a cold sore or infection. It is also advised not to dip the soother in sugar, jam or honey.

Using a soother during active daytime (playtime) can disturb speech development, such as babbling and making sounds. Sucking a soother or a finger can change the position of your baby's teeth. Help your child to give up the soother or thumb as soon as possible. This can be done from one year of age. Advice is available at www.mychild.ie



Best Drinks

Milk and water are the best drinks



Breastfeeding is good for baby teeth. After feeding your baby breastmilk remember to wipe gums and brush your child's teeth twice a day to keep their mouth and teeth clean and healthy. Visit the dentist by baby's first birthday for further advice.

Encourage your baby to drink from a free flow sippy cup, one with no valve, from 6 months and then move to an open cup. Teaching your baby to drink from an open cup can take many months. Your baby has to move from a sucking action (bottle and sippy cup) to a free flow cup and then to an open cup.



Once your child is 12 months of age, using feeding bottles or sippy cups with valves, where baby still has to suck, greatly increases their chance of getting tooth decay.



Sucking on a bottle, or a sippy cup, with either formula, milk, or sweet drinks (juices, tea with sugar, fizzy drinks) adds to the contact time with the teeth. This can cause tooth decay especially if the teeth are not brushed twice a day. It is best to finish feeding before putting your baby to bed. Even milk can cause decay if a baby is let sleep with it in its mouth.

Tap water and milk are the healthiest options for children over 12 months to relieve thirst during the day. Most tap water in Ireland contains fluoride which helps protect teeth from tooth decay. If your home has well water, which will not have fluoride in it, ask a dentist for further advice on how to keep your baby's teeth healthy.

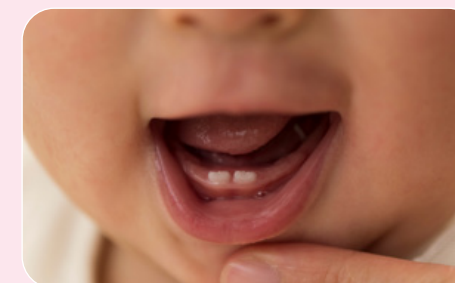


Full fat milk is suitable up to the age of 2 years. Low-fat milk is suitable from 2 years, skimmed milk is not suitable for under 5's.

In general children from 12 months of age can drink full milk and water and do not need formula. If you are unsure ask your doctor or public health nurse for advice.

Teething

Babies may be restless or irritable when teething. However, teething does not cause a baby to become ill, so any sick child should be seen by a doctor. Signs of teething include red flushed cheeks, baby seems cranky, has sore gums and dribbles a lot or chews on their fists or toys more than usual.



To help ease discomfort allow your baby to chew on a clean cold teething ring and avoid ointments which numb the gum unless recommended by your doctor or dentist.