

HOW TO COPE

with the care of early toddler teeth and the onset of teething

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You may have heard people saying 'Baby teeth? They're no big deal, sure they will fall out anyway', but the truth is that baby teeth do matter. They are crucial to your child's early physical, social and emotional development. Healthy baby teeth will also pave the way for healthy adult teeth because they hold that important space for the adult tooth, which is developing underneath, to grow into.

Dental caries (tooth decay) is the most common chronic childhood disease and significantly impacts the health and wellbeing of a child and is an added

cost for parents to have decay treated. Untreated tooth decay can cause pain and infections that may lead to problems with eating, speaking, playing, and learning. Children who have poor oral health often miss more school and receive lower grades than children who don't.

By helping your child to look after their teeth, you are starting habits that will last them their lifetime. Starting early will minimise their risk of developing conditions such as decay and erosion and encourage the healthy development of their permanent adult teeth. As soon as the child's teeth appear they are at risk of tooth decay. Research shows if

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A child has tooth decay at a young age that they are likely to have tooth decay and gum disease as an adult.

In today's world children are looked after by many carers – grandparents, nannies, creches during the day, meaning less parental control over snacking, sugary drinks and supervised toothbrushing. Not every carer has oral health knowledge or oral health habits so positively influence your child's oral health, so have a chat with them about making good care of your little one's teeth.

Tooth Tips for 0-2 years:

When a baby is born, the first set of teeth is already there, 20 baby teeth are below the gum line. The good news is that tooth decay is preventable, here's how.

- Establish a cleaning habit early and baby will become accustomed to it.
- Use a clean damp cloth to clean baby's gums before bed and after a feed, to remove bacteria and sugars.
- When the first tooth appears (around 6 months) brush twice a day with a soft toothbrush and water. Avoid toothpaste unless advised by your Dentist. It is not recommended to use toothpaste for children aged 0-2 years.
- Visit the dentist by baby's first birthday to spot signs of problems early.

Diet Tips

Babies are not born with a sweet tooth and will enjoy homemade baby foods without sugar. If you're buying baby foods, look out for the ones without sugar. The food and drinks that they are given in the early years will influence their food choices as they grow up.

- Avoid sweet drinks, juice, tea or fruit drinks in baby's bottle.
- Breastfeed or give breastmilk, formula or cooled boiled tap water in baby's bottle.
- Unflavoured milk and water are the most tooth friendly drinks.
- Read food labels carefully for sugar content. Less than 5g per 100g is low sugar. Don't add sugar to food or drinks.
- Choose healthy snacks between meals.

General Tips

- Encourage drinking from a free flow sippy cup from 6 months.
- Using a bottle after 12 months of age increases the risk of tooth decay.
- Babies should sleep without a bottle in their mouth.
- Don't dip a soother in honey, jam or anything sweet (only use an Orthodontic soother, wean the baby off it as soon as possible, as it can affect the way a baby's teeth grow).
- Some babies like to suck their thumb for comfort, long-term sucking of thumbs can affect the position of the teeth. Encourage your child to stop thumb-sucking by the age of 4 years. Thumb-sucking after this age may push their teeth out of shape.
- Be aware that the bacteria that cause tooth decay can be transferred from a parent/carer to an infant through sharing of toothbrushes, spoons and cups or licking soothers. In this case sharing is not caring!

For slightly older children (2-7 years), brush their teeth twice daily with fluoride toothpaste using a pea-sized amount of toothpaste and always spit it out after, and don't rinse. Help your child brush until they have good brushing skills, usually until the age of seven or eight. Encourage your child to drink tap water that contains fluoride, as it helps prevent decay. Children living in areas with fluoridated tap water have less tooth decay than children whose water is not fluoridated. Similarly, children who brush twice daily with fluoride toothpaste will have less decay.

Teething

This can be a trying time for both babies and parents, however, teething won't cause your baby to be unwell. There are many 'wives' tales' around teething including that it may cause diarrhoea, a rash or a fever, this is not the case. Symptoms may include disturbed sleep, feeding irritability and swollen tender gums. The most common side effect is drooling or dribbling. You can help your baby, by giving them something to chew on, such as a cooled teething ring or a small cold spoon (never put these in the freezer as you could damage your baby's gums). If they are 6 months or older, chewing on a bread stick or vegetable stick may also help, but don't leave your child alone to avoid any risk of choking. Milk or cooled boiled water may also help. If necessary, ask your doctor or public health nurse to recommend a

mild pain reliever—sugar-free. If your child has diarrhoea or a fever, see your doctor. Amber beads are often sold as baby teething aids in the form of amber teething jewellery including necklaces, bracelets and anklets. Do not use these products as they are very unsafe and a choke hazard.

We have developed a guide to tooth development which you can read here: <https://www.dental-health.ie/children-oral-health/infants/tooth-development1/> We also have lots of resources which include information about oral health routines, healthy diet, the importance of visiting the dentist, as well as advice for parents. Please see our website for further information www.dentalhealth.ie

0-2 years old

Strong teeth are a great start to your baby's overall health, helping them to eat well, speak well and have a bright smile.

From birth, taking care of your baby's gums and teeth will set them up with a healthy mouth for life.

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