



Babies and Oral Health

Babies' oral health is easily overlooked due to their young age, but tooth decay begins soon after the first teeth appear. Frequent exposure to sugary liquids, such as milk, formula, fruit juice and soda, can feed the bacteria on a baby's teeth and gums, resulting in plaque buildup.¹

Below are just a few easy ways you can improve the oral health of your baby:

- Never let your baby fall asleep with a bottle.¹
- Wean your baby from the bottle as soon as they can drink from a cup.
- Clean your baby's gums once a day with a moistened cloth by gently massaging teeth and gums.¹

Teething

Teething may begin as early as three months. The gums around the emerging teeth may be swollen and tender. Sometimes a cyst may appear at the site of the new tooth, but cysts are usually not painful for children. Give your baby firm objects to chew on, such as teething rings or hard, unsweetened teething crackers. Frozen teething toys should not be used; extreme cold can injure your baby's mouth and cause more discomfort.

Oral pain relievers applied to gums may not be helpful as a teething baby drools so much that the medication is washed away. Pediatricians also warn such medications can numb the back of the throat

and interfere with your baby's ability to swallow. If your baby is uncomfortable, talk to your pediatrician about a course of action.²

The first tooth

When the first tooth appears, brush your baby's teeth gently with a soft toothbrush and a smear of fluoride toothpaste. About six months after the first tooth breaks the surface, it's time to schedule a dentist appointment.²

Pain, infection and extraction of teeth can result if tooth decay is left untreated, while problems like speech difficulty and crooked teeth may develop later.

Make sure your child has healthy baby teeth and healthy permanent teeth usually follow.

¹"Caring for Your Child's Teeth", Delta Dental Plans Association, <http://oralhealth.deltadental.com/Child/22,Delta62>, accessed 4/2017.

²"How to ease a baby's teething pain", American Academy of Pediatrics, www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/baby/teething-tooth-care/Pages/Teething-Pain.aspx, accessed 4/2017.