

Taking care of your baby's teeth

Remember...

- Healthy teeth allow your toddler to eat, speak and smile.
- Baby teeth keep the space for permanent teeth, so they need to be looked after.
- Your child's baby teeth will appear any time from birth to 27 months.
- Start tooth-brushing as soon as the first tooth appears to prevent tooth decay.
- Teething problems can include pain and irritability.
- Have good oral hygiene to avoid passing tooth-decaying bacteria to your baby.
- Only put breast milk, formula or water in your baby's bottle. Hold your baby close when feeding. Do not leave your baby alone to drink the bottle.

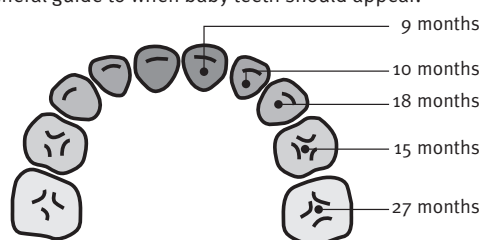
About baby teeth

Healthy teeth allow children to:

- eat a nutritious diet
- speak properly
- have a healthy smile.

Baby teeth also help to maintain the space for the permanent teeth. Early loss of a baby tooth can reduce the space for a permanent tooth, resulting in crowding.

The timing of the appearance of baby teeth can vary greatly. This diagram is a general guide to when baby teeth should appear.



Taking care of teeth

As soon as your baby's teeth appear, brush them with a child-sized, soft toothbrush. Clean their teeth daily because plaque (a sticky, invisible film of bacteria and left-over food) will form in your baby's mouth just as it does in your own.

Brush your baby's teeth with a small, pea-size amount of low fluoride toothpaste after your baby turns six months in non-fluoridated areas and after 18 months in fluoridated areas*.

Low fluoride toothpastes created especially for children under six years of age are available in most supermarkets or pharmacies.

Children only require a small amount of fluoride toothpaste and should not be allowed to dispense toothpaste without supervision. Toothpaste should be kept out of reach of children.

Parents should assist with brushing of teeth until children are about eight years of age.

Fluoride

Fluoride helps to protect teeth.

Fluoride can be obtained through fluoride toothpaste, fluoridated water and fluoride supplements.

Fluoride supplements do not provide the same benefit as fluoridated water. If your water supply is not fluoridated, seek advice on your options from a dental professional.

Teething problems

Some babies and toddlers may experience teething problems such as:

- red, swollen gums
- irritability and restlessness
- flushed cheeks or fever
- dribbling
- finger and fist-sucking.

Mild teething problems may be eased by letting your baby chew on objects such as crusts of bread, rusks or teething rings.

Rubbing your child's gums with your finger or applying a small amount of teething gel may also help to ease teething pain.

Did you know... Your oral hygiene could affect the oral health of your baby!

Newborn babies do not have the bacteria (germs) in their mouth that can cause tooth decay (holes). Anyone, including the mother, can pass the bacteria that causes tooth decay on to a baby through sharing spoons or cleaning a dummy or bottle in their own mouth.

It is important for parents to have good oral hygiene – brushing twice a day with a small soft head toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste – to reduce or eliminate the chance of passing bacteria to your baby.

What is infant tooth decay?

Infant tooth decay occurs soon after the first teeth appear. Infant tooth decay occurs more often when children are given bottles containing sugary drinks, such as juice, cordial and soft drink.

Infant tooth decay is less common in breastfed babies.

How to prevent infant tooth decay

- Breastmilk is best for your baby.
- The best drinks for your baby are breastmilk, formula or water.
- Only put breast milk, formula or water in your baby's bottle. Hold your baby close when feeding. Do not leave your baby alone to drink the bottle.
- As soon as your baby's teeth appear, brush them with a child-sized, soft toothbrush. Introduce a small, pea-size amount of low fluoride toothpaste after your baby turns six months in non-fluoridated areas and after 18 months in fluoridated areas*.
- Ensure all family members have good oral health – brushing twice a day with a small, soft toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste – to prevent the transmission of bacteria to your baby.
- If using a dummy, do not add flavouring. Never clean a dummy in your mouth, as this will transfer bacteria from your mouth to your baby. Check the dummy regularly for rips and tears and replace it if these are found.
- Try introducing a cup from about six months of age and try to stop bottle use from about 12 months of age.
- Remember, infant tooth decay is preventable. If you think your baby has infant tooth decay, or you would like additional information about preventing it, contact a dental professional.

For more information on oral health, go to www.health.qld.gov.au/oralhealth

Acknowledgement

This fact sheet is the result of input and effort from many health professionals in Queensland. Their help with the content is greatly appreciated.

To access the full set of fact sheets, go to <http://www.health.qld.gov.au/child&youth/factsheets>.

*Your dental professional will be able to advise if your local water supply is fluoridated.