- Dental care / Hygiene

How to look after your baby's teeth

Form good dental hygiene habits right from the start

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So, you've just gone through teething (or you're about to) and now your baby has a brand-new tooth that needs to be looked after. You may think that your baby is too young for any sort of dental care routine but that couldn't be further from the truth!



From the moment that first, shiny tooth pops its head out into the open, dental health becomes important.

Until their adult teeth come through, your child will need to rely on their milk teeth, so it is very important that you begin to care for them as early as possible, beginning with a trip to the dentist.

Brushing your child's teeth

The best way to look after your baby's teeth is to get into the habit of brushing them, even if there is only one! Use a soft toothbrush with water to begin with.

Then at the age of 18 months choose a lowfluoride toothpaste suitable for use in children. It's also important to begin flossing right from the start!

Before their teeth arrive, get into good habits by wiping their gums with a soft cloth twice a day. Don't be too concerned if you can't brush their teeth much at first. The most important thing is to get into the habit of brushing, so your baby knows that it's a part of their daily routine.

As your child gets older, it may be tempting to let them brush their own teeth unassisted. Though it is important to teach your child to brush independently, it is a good idea to continue helping them brush their teeth until they're around seven or eight-years-old and can do it well enough on their own.

Cut down on sugar

Sugar is a source of food for the bacteria that live in our mouth. The bacteria produce acid, which can damage the outer surface of the tooth (called the enamel). While saliva in our mouth helps to repair this damage, if there is more damage than repair a hole in the tooth (known as a cavity) can develop.

Babies who are settled to sleep with a bottle of milk (or other sweet drinks) can be especially at risk, since the liquid can pool in their mouths and feed the bacteria that cause tooth decay while they sleep. It is best to limit sweets as much as possible and establish good healthy eating habits early.

Consider the following tips to reduce the amount of time your child's teeth are in contact with sugar:

- Don't put your baby to bed with a bottle
- Never put sweet drinks in a baby's bottle
- Teach your child to drink from a cup from around six months of age
- From 12 months, only water or plain full-fat milk should be their main drink choices
- Fruit juice is not necessary or recommended for children due to its high sugar content and acidity

Sugar can be tricky to identify in different foods since they go by many different names. Some common names for sugar on ingredient lists include fructose, sucrose, dextrose and glucose. Avoiding foods with added sugars is one of the most important things you can do to keep your teeth healthy.

When should I take my baby to see a dentist?

The Australian Dental Association advises that the earlier parents begin taking their baby to the dentist, the better.

As a good rule of thumb, you should start considering a dentist visit for your little one as soon as their teeth start to come out.

Your dentist will be able to make sure that your baby's teeth are all coming out as expected and give you valuable advice on how to keep your baby's teeth healthy and strong.

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