

GETTING A GREAT START

# Your baby's or toddler's teeth: aged up to 3



When it comes to the oral health of your baby or toddler, preventing dental disease starts early. Here we take a look at how to help your child off to a great start!

## Your child's first teeth

Milk teeth start to appear when your baby is 4–8 months old and by the age of 3 they will have a complete set of incisors and molars. Around the age of 6 or 7 the first adult (permanent) teeth erupt and your child will lose their last milk teeth between the ages of 10–13. However, it may take another 7–10 years before their final adult (wisdom) teeth appear.

## Coping with teething

Often a problem for infants (and their parents!), teething can be confused with other childhood ailments, but in general the usual signs are hot cheeks, dribbling, excessive gnawing/chewing or your child may just be fretful.

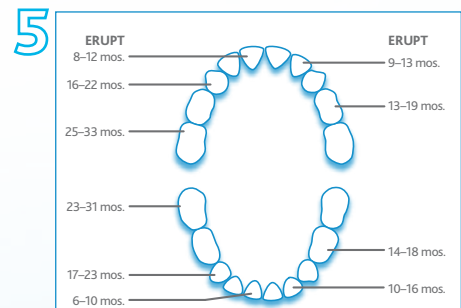
Try the following:

- gently massage gums with a clean finger
- let them chew on a rusk or a teething ring (cooled in the fridge first)
- sugar-free teething gels or liquid suspension analgesics may soothe your baby's pain and discomfort (always read the label first).

**If you are unsure or your child has a fever, consult a healthcare practitioner for advice.**

### Did you know?

- 1 Milk (also known as deciduous, baby or primary teeth) and adult (permanent) teeth begin to form before birth.
- 2 Although rare, infants can be born with some of their teeth in place.
- 3 It is much more usual for the first teeth to erupt between the ages of 4–8 months.
- 4 As soon as teeth erupt, they are at risk of decay (caries) and a fluoride toothpaste specially designed for children is recommended to protect teeth.



By the age of 3, all primary teeth will have erupted – 20 teeth in all.

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### Sugar and tooth decay

As babies learn to distinguish different tastes, they clearly delight in sweet foods. However, as these can directly contribute to tooth decay, it is important to limit their intake of sugary foods and drinks – especially between meals.

- Avoid adding sugar or honey to foods you prepare yourself and opt for sugar-free varieties of commercially prepared meals.
- If using a baby bottle at night, only give water as juice (or other soft drinks) will bathe teeth in a sugary solution whilst the child is drinking.
- Diluted fruit juice can be given in a training cup or beaker at meal times.

### Helping your child brush

- Start cleaning your baby’s teeth as soon as they appear by gently wiping with a cloth or try using a baby toothbrush that fits on your finger.
- Your child’s first proper toothbrush should have a small head and soft bristles – a long (adult-sized) handle is helpful when brushing their teeth for them.
- Supervised brushing every morning and before bed – with a pea-sized smear of children’s fluoride toothpaste – is a good routine for your baby or toddler to get into. Encourage your child to spit after brushing.
- As dexterity improves, allow your toddler to hold the brush while you guide it around their mouth. This will help develop the right technique, not forgetting to brush behind the teeth as well.
- Keep an eye on your child while they brush to minimise swallowing of toothpaste.

Refer to ‘Establishing a routine – Your child and their teeth: aged 4 to 6’ on how to encourage children to brush independently.

### Your child’s first dental visit

Dental disease can be prevented or minimised with regular dental visits as your dentist will be able to provide advice on brushing and diet. They will also check on tooth development as well as spot any early signs of decay.

Register your baby with a dentist at birth, and take them along with you or other family members as this reinforces the dental practice as a positive environment and helps to lessen anxiety. Arrange regular dental check-ups every 6 months from around the age of 2 or earlier if advised by your dentist.

If you – as a parent – are uneasy about dental treatments, it is possible that you will pass your fears on to your child. If you have any concerns, discuss these with your dentist away from them.

**Looking after milk teeth is important for a healthy smile and helps guide the formation of their adult teeth.**

### Checklist for healthy teeth

- 1 Start early:** as soon as the first teeth erupt introduce your baby to brushing and establish a twice-daily routine.
- 2 Make brushing fun:** interactive games, story books or rhyming songs reinforce brushing as a positive activity rather than a chore.
- 3 Lead by example:** brush along with your toddler so that they learn a good technique (get a refresher on brushing from your dentist or hygienist first!).
- 4 Two minute rule:** brushing for at least 2 minutes morning and night not only cleans but also allows more time for fluoride to work and help keep tooth enamel strong.
- 5 Avoid a sweet tooth:** limit intake of sugary foods and drinks and encourage your child to eat healthy snacks between meals.
- 6 Dental check-ups:** from the age of 2 (or at an age suggested by your dentist) arrange regular check-ups every 6 months for your child.