



Oral Care: Teething and Gum Care for Infants



A baby's tooth development starts before they are born, in the womb itself. Typically teeth start appearing between the ages of six and ten months in babies. But, in some babies, they may appear a little early, whereas in some a little late, i.e., when the baby is almost a year old. Generally teeth appear first at the centre of the bottom gum and the rest follow subsequently in a specific order, which may vary slightly in babies. In newborns, there are 20 hidden baby teeth; all of them arrive fully by the time the baby turns three.

The eruption of teeth in babies is known as teething. Providing good oral care for your baby helps their overall health. Babies may show multiple symptoms such as getting irritated, drooling a lot, trouble falling asleep, becoming fussy, and loss of appetite, when they start teething; all these are normal symptoms. However, if your baby has diarrhea, rash or fever and is uncomfortable, you should contact your Pediatrician.



What can you do to take care of your baby's oral health?

You may start oral hygiene for your baby before their tooth appears by following these steps:

Gently wipe your child's gum with a moist washcloth using your index finger after feeding him or her.

Lightly massage your baby's gum.

Avoid letting your baby sleep with a bottle. When babies sleep with a bottle in their mouth, the milk tends to collect in their mouth, which may then become a reason for tooth decay.



Your baby's first tooth might appear when they are between six and eight months. Here are certain points you can follow when your infant's teeth start appearing:

- Once your baby starts teething, give them a cold teething ring or a cold spoon. Ensure you use a teething ring that is not harmful to the baby and is made of a safe material. A cold teething ring may help soothe your baby's sore gums.
- To prevent any type of oral infection, you should avoid sharing spoons with your baby. Moreover, avoid using your mouth to clean the bottle nipple or pacifier or to verify the temperature of your infant's bottle (milk).
- Use a soft-bristled toothbrush meant for children to clean your child's teeth. The use of toothpaste is not advisable at this age.
- You should keep a check on your baby's teeth by frequently examining them for any brown or white spots; there may be chances of developing cavities if the spots are present and you should consult a dentist at the earliest.

When your baby is between 12 and 18 months or older, ensure you limit their intake of sweetened foods and beverages, especially between meals. Moreover, you can ask your Pediatrician about a suitable fluoride supplement if the drinking water you use is not fluoridated. After your child turns 2, and develops the ability to swallow, you can start using a small amount (pea-sized) of fluoridated toothpaste to brush their teeth. It should be carefully monitored that the child doesn't swallow the toothpaste. Preferably, you should brush your child's teeth twice every day.

Thumb sucking and using pacifiers for an extended period of time can disrupt the alignment of your baby's teeth; therefore, the use of a pacifier should be discontinued when your baby is around two years old. Maintaining good oral health for the baby and regular dental check-ups play an essential role in the overall good health of your child and should, thus, be followed meticulously.



“Proper oral care and regular dental check-ups play an essential role in the overall health of your baby.”



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