

Tooth Development in Babies and Toddlers

Your baby's first teeth (known as primary teeth) are just as important as their permanent teeth. They help your child to learn to chew, speak properly and most importantly, these teeth reserve the space in your child's gums for the eruption of their permanent teeth.

What you need to know about Primary teeth

Primary teeth start to form in your child's jawbone before birth. A baby's first primary tooth usually erupts at about six months of age. However, this can occur as early as birth or as late as your child's first birthday. The average child has a full set of 20 primary teeth by the age of two to three years. Your child's first visit to the dentist should be within six months of the eruption of their first tooth, or by their first birthday.

What you need to know about teething

The appearance of primary teeth is commonly called 'teething'. Many babies experience some discomfort during teething.

Most babies are irritable when new teeth break through their gums. Signs and symptoms of teething can include:

- Frequent crying and crankiness
- A mild fever
- Reddened cheeks and drooling
- Loss of or reduced appetite
- Mild diarrhoea
- Sucking or gnawing on toys
- Pulling the ear on the same side as the erupting tooth

It is extremely important not to ignore symptoms such as fever and diarrhoea in your child. If these symptoms occur, seek medical advice to eliminate other reasons for the symptoms.

To help relieve the discomfort of teething, here are some recommendations from the ADA:

- Wash your hands and gently rub your baby's gums with a clean finger
- Give your baby a teething ring or wet washcloth to bite. Teething rings can be chilled in the refrigerator before being used to help manage discomfort associated with teething (do not put teething rings in the freezer)
- Give your baby non-sweetened rusks to chew on

Signs and symptoms may appear and disappear over several days. Ask your dentist or pharmacist for advice before using any pain relief specifically created for babies and toddlers. Never give aspirin to a baby or young child.

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For more information on caring for your teeth visit the ADA's website:
www.ada.org.au

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What about thumb sucking?

Thumb sucking is a natural reflex in babies and young children. Most children lose interest in thumb sucking and dummies at two to four years of age.

Children who continue to suck their thumb or fingers after their permanent teeth have appeared risk developing crooked teeth, particularly if the sucking is forceful or frequent. Also, speech defects may arise, especially with “s” and “th” sounds.

Gently encourage your child to give up thumb sucking. See your dentist for advice if your child cannot stop thumb sucking by the end of their first year at school. In rare cases, referral to a child psychologist may be helpful.

An important note about your oral health

For parents and primary carers of babies, it's important that you look after your own teeth. By looking after your own teeth, you set a good example for your children and your children will be more likely to follow your example.

To help the health of your child's mouth, you can try the following:

- Have a dental check-up before your baby is born

Practise good oral hygiene before and after your baby is born. With a newborn, it can be difficult to find time for yourself, however ensure that you:

- Brush your teeth twice a day with fluoridated toothpaste
- Floss daily
- Drink fluoridated tap water
- Limit your intake of high sugar foods
- Make sure you have regular dental check ups

For more information on oral care for babies and toddlers, visit the Australian Dental Association's Baby Teeth website:

www.babyteeth.com.au

