

After reading this lesson, click the survey link at the end to answer a few questions and receive nutrition education credit for your class.

Healthy Smiles from the Start: Setting Your Baby Up for a Lifetime of Strong Teeth.



Taking care of your baby's teeth now will set them up for a lifetime of healthy smiles.

Even though "baby teeth" will eventually fall out, it is still important to keep them healthy to prevent tooth decay and dental problems later in life. Healthy teeth will help your child's speech development, give them a confident smile, and allow them to eat a variety of foods to nourish their bodies. Keep reading to learn more!

Most babies get their first tooth between 6-12 months of age.

Like everything else with your little one, this is just a guide. Some babies are born with teeth, and some don't show their first tooth until after their first birthday.

Start preventing cavities now.

Did you know that babies can develop cavities just like adults? To prevent cavities in your baby's teeth, follow these tips:

1. Start wiping your baby's gums with a clean damp washcloth or gauze pad after feeding, even before their first teeth start to pop through.
2. Begin brushing your baby's teeth twice a day when their first tooth erupts. Choose a toothbrush with soft bristles designed for baby teeth.
3. Only put formula, breastmilk, or water in your baby's bottle. Finish bottle feedings before putting baby to bed to help prevent "baby bottle tooth decay."
4. Sweetened drinks (like fruit juice and soda), sticky or gummy foods, and foods that are high in added sugar can cause cavities.
5. All mouths contain bacteria. Avoid sharing toothbrushes and utensils, and do not put things in your mouth (like pacifiers) to "clean" them.
6. The American Dental Association recommends making your baby's first dental appointment after their first tooth comes through, or by their first birthday at the latest.
7. Plan to transition from a bottle to a cup around the time your baby turns 1 year old.



General Guidance About Fluoride:

- Fluoride is a mineral that helps to strengthen teeth and prevent cavities.
- When your baby's first tooth appears, begin brushing twice per day with only a "smear" or "rice-sized" amount of fluoride toothpaste according to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).
- In some regions, there may be concern about too much or too little fluoride available in drinking water; please consult your child's doctor or dentist for the best guidelines about fluoride.

Teething can be a real pain.

Teething can be very uncomfortable for some babies. They may bite in the area where the tooth is coming in, their gums may look swollen and feel tender, and they are likely to drool a lot more than usual. Some babies are also fussier when they are teething, may not eat as much, and may have trouble sleeping. These are all normal signs of teething, but if your baby seems too uncomfortable be sure to check with your baby's doctor.



Teething pain? Try these tips!

- Babies LOVE to put things in their mouths to explore, and chewing on different objects can help ease some of their discomfort. Make sure items are clean and safe before letting your baby chew.
- Pressure and cold can feel good on sore gums but avoid things that are too cold. If using teething rings or silicone teething toys, put them in the refrigerator instead of the freezer so they are just the right temperature for your baby's mouth. Use only solid (not liquid filled) teething toys. You can also try a cool, clean, slightly damp washcloth or a cool spoon.
- Some babies find relief when a clean finger is used to lightly massage their sore gums. Baby teeth can be very sharp, so be careful to avoid little bites.
- Over the counter teething gels, liquids or tablets and teething necklaces are not recommended. These can be dangerous for your baby.
- Your baby may prefer cool and soft foods when they are teething. Try things like yogurt, applesauce, pureed baby foods, mashed avocado, or ripe bananas. Follow your baby's lead and remember their main source of nutrition will be breastmilk or formula for the first year. If they do not want to eat many solids for a few days due to teething, that's ok. You can keep offering, but do not force.
- Talk to your baby's doctor about using an infant pain reliever if your baby is still uncomfortable after trying the strategies above.

Congratulations, you have finished!

Have more questions? Contact your local WIC nutritionist!

STOP!

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