BABY TEETH

Baby teeth are the first set of teeth that typically show when a baby is between 6 months and 1 year old. The first teeth to come in are usually the top and bottom front teeth, although each child is different. Most children have a full set of 20 primary teeth by the time they are 3 years old.

Baby teeth serve many important purposes, including helping infants chew, speak, and smile – all important developmental milestones. These first set of teeth also hold space in the jaws for the permanent adult teeth that are growing under the gums. If a baby tooth is lost too early, surrounding teeth can move into the empty space, crowding the adult teeth that will come in later and causing teeth to be crooked or overlapped.
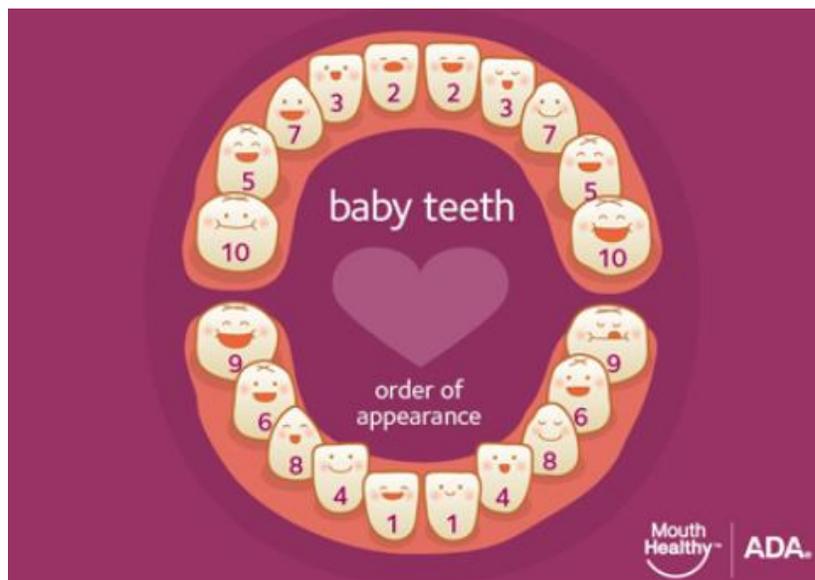
Source: American Dental Association, 2020.[1]

How to soothe a teething baby

Teething is when the teeth push through the gums. Most babies get fussy during teething because their gums are tender and ache. To soothe a teething baby, gently rub the gums with a clean finger, a gauze pad or a clean washcloth soaked with cool water, or a small, cool spoon. Always wash your hands thoroughly before and after.

Providing baby with a clean teething ring should be comforting, especially if it is slightly chilled in the refrigerator. Do not freeze a teething ring, as anything too cold can cause injury to the gums. Be sure to clean the teething ring with dishwashing cleaner or hand soap, rinsing well. Clean it every time the baby uses it and every time the baby throws it down.

It is not recommended to use teething rings filled with liquid, as the baby's emerging teeth could pierce them. When not in use, store the teething ring in a safe place where other people and pets cannot touch it.

If your baby is still fussy and in pain, consult your dentist or physician. Since some over-the-counter products intended to numb or soothe pain from teething can be unsafe for younger children, always ask a doctor before giving your baby those products.

Baby's first dental checkup

Make baby's first dental appointment after the first tooth comes in and before baby's first birthday. During this and future "well-baby checkups" for the teeth, the dentist will look for cavities and other problems, show how to clean baby's teeth properly, and share how to handle habits like thumb-sucking.

How to take care of your child's teeth

To protect baby's teeth through adulthood, begin good oral care within the first year.

- A few days after birth, begin wiping baby's gums with a clean, moist gauze pad or washcloth after every feeding. This protects against mouth infections and washes away debris. Decay can occur as soon as teeth appear.

- Children younger than 3 years should start brushing their teeth as soon as their teeth erupt. Use fluoride toothpaste in a tiny amount that is the size of a grain of rice. With a child-sized toothbrush, brush teeth twice daily (morning and night), or as directed by a dentist or physician. Parents should supervise young children's toothbrushing so they use the correct amount of toothpaste.

- Children 3 to 6 years of age should use a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste on a child-sized toothbrush and brush teeth well morning and night, or as directed by a dentist or physician. Supervise children's toothbrushing and remind them not to swallow the toothpaste until you are comfortable that your child can brush on his or her own. Begin cleaning between their teeth every day (such as with floss) when your child has two teeth that touch.

For more information, contact the Division of Public Health, Bureau of Oral Health and Dental Services, at 302-622-4540 and www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/hsm/ohphome.html.

Resources

1. American Dental Association. 2020. *Baby Teeth.* In Mouth Healthy. Retrieved July 17, 2020 from https://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/b/baby-teeth