

Childcare

and Children's Health

AN INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARENTS



Oral Health

Many people think that 'baby' teeth are less important than 'adult' teeth, but looking after your child's first teeth is vital. In fact, good oral health begins even before these first teeth appear. A combination of good brushing, a healthy diet and regular visits to the dentist will help your children to grow strong and healthy teeth.

Brushing and cleaning teeth

Even before teeth appear, it's a good idea to clean your baby's gums and tongue using water and a washcloth or an extra soft brush after feeds, particularly in the mornings and evenings.

As soon as the first tooth appears, use a soft toothbrush designed for children under two years of age. Brush with water at least twice a day, particularly after the first and last feeds. Very young children do not need to use toothpaste. You can start using a low-fluoride toothpaste on your child's toothbrush from when they are 18 months old.

Young children should brush their teeth twice a day – once after breakfast and once after dinner. Older children can be encouraged to rinse their mouths with water after meals and snacks.

Until about the age of eight, your child will need your help and supervision cleaning their teeth.

Healthy eating to prevent tooth decay

- Avoid sweet, sticky foods and drinks – these contribute to tooth decay as sugars form acids which can attack tooth enamel.
- Babies under 4-6 months only need breastmilk or formula.
- Water is the best drink for children (in areas with fluoride in the water, tap water is of particular benefit). Unflavoured milk is also free of added sugar and a suitable alternative to water.
- When children are old enough, encourage them to drink water or rinse their mouth out after they've eaten.

Oral health tips

- Remember that you can look after your child's teeth, even before they appear.
- Don't settle your baby in bed with a bottle of milk.
- Give up bottle feeding by 12 months.
- Children should first visit the dentist at around 12 months of age (or within six months of their first tooth appearing).
- Celebrate when your child loses a tooth – it's a big event for children, particularly the first time.
- Avoid using dummies after your child is four years old.

This Parent Fact Sheet is available in different community languages and can be downloaded along with references from www.rch.org.au/ccch

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