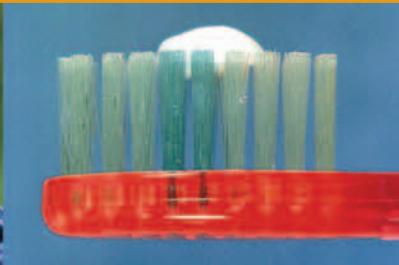


# LOOKING AFTER YOUR CHILD'S TEETH

0 - 8 YEARS



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive



*This booklet answers some of the most frequently asked questions about your child's teeth.*

Produced by the Oral Health Promoters, Dental Service, H.S.E. (South Western Area)

# Q

When will my baby's teeth appear?

# A

The first tooth normally appears when the baby is about 6 months old.



- The front four teeth (two on the top and two on the bottom) are the first to appear, at about **six months**.
- By the time your child is **2 1/2 years** of age, most of their first teeth have appeared.
- There are 20 baby teeth in total (ten on top and ten on bottom).
- Remember that adult (permanent) teeth appear at the back of the mouth, behind the baby teeth, when the child is about **6 years** of age.

# Q

Are baby teeth important?

# A

Yes, baby teeth are important for the following reasons:



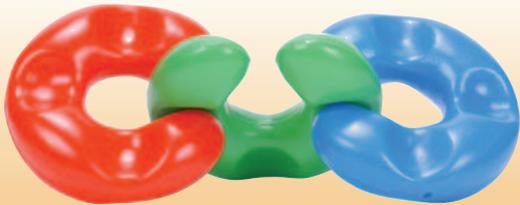
- They help a child to bite and chew food.
- They act as a guide for the adult teeth - some baby teeth are not lost until the child is 11 or 12 years old.
- They help a child to develop speech.
- Healthy baby teeth are important for a child's self-confidence and smile.

# Q

Is teething a problem?

# A

Some children do have teething problems, including:



- red and swollen gums
- red cheeks
- dribbling
- disturbed sleep

Certain teething rings that may help can be cooled in the fridge. Massaging gums may also help.

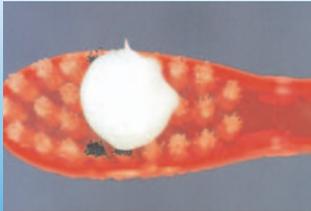
Teething may not **always** be to blame for the above symptoms.

# Q

When should I start cleaning my baby's teeth?

# A

Cleaning should start as soon as the first tooth appears.



- Use a small **soft** toothbrush and **tap water**.  
Toothpaste is not recommended for children under two years of age.
- Children over two years may use a **pea-sized** amount of fluoride **toothpaste**.
- Parents should **supervise** brushing in children under seven years and **avoid** toothpaste being **swallowed**.
- Teeth should be cleaned in the **morning** and at **bed time**.
- **Change** your child's toothbrush every three months or when the bristles get ragged.

# Q

Is diet important for healthy teeth?

# A

Yes, good dental habits begun early in life can keep teeth strong and healthy and provide a good start for adult teeth.



- It's not the amount of sugar in food or drink that causes damage to childrens' teeth, it's the **number** of **times** they have sugar.
- Keep sugary foods and drinks to **meal times** only - avoid snacks containing sugar between meals.
- **Healthy** snack options include fresh fruit, vegetables, plain yoghurts, cheese and bread.
- **Milk** and **water** are the most tooth-friendly drinks. Keep all fruit juices and squashes to meal times only.
- Other kinds of sugar harmful to teeth include glucose, maltose and sucrose, so check the label.
- 'Low sugar' or 'no added sugar' labels do **not** mean the food or drink is sugar-free.
- Choose sugar-free medicines when you can.

# Q

What is baby bottle / nursing decay?

# A

When fizzy drinks, juices, milk or breast milk are in constant contact with a baby's teeth, the teeth can decay, as shown in the picture.



Picture courtesy of the Dental Health Foundation



- Don't let your child sleep with a bottle or feeder in his/her mouth.
- From your child's first birthday, encourage him/her to drink from a beaker or cup.
- Breast-feeding is beneficial for your child's development. Try to breast-feed at routine intervals. Even breast milk in constant contact with a baby's teeth can cause decay.
- Never dip a soother in sugar, honey or anything sweet before giving it to your child.
- Do not forget to brush the teeth after the last feed of the day.

# Q

Can thumb-sucking or sucking soothers cause problems?

# A

Yes, some children suck their thumbs very hard and this can pull their teeth out of line.



- Babies like to suck for comfort.
- Long-term sucking of thumbs or soothers can affect the position of the teeth.
- Encourage your child to stop thumb-sucking by school age.
- Never dip a soother in sugar, honey or anything sweet before giving it to your child.

Q

What should I do if my child bangs his/her teeth or mouth?

A

Bring your child to a dentist if his/her teeth are accidentally banged or damaged.

If any **adult** tooth is knocked out, follow these simple steps quickly:

- Find the tooth.
- Put it back in the socket if you can.
- If this is not possible place it in a cup of cold milk. Don't wash it.
- Go to your dentist immediately.



