

Your Baby's Teeth

When Do They Erupt?

There are 20 deciduous (baby) teeth. The first tooth normally appears around 6 months of age, the last will erupt around 2 1/2 - 3 years of age. These figures are averages, there is a wide degree of variation. Bottom teeth usually come first, but this is not always the case.

What Do I Look For?

There is no way to predict when a tooth will erupt. A few days before a tooth is about to erupt a swelling or lump may appear on your babies gum. Its colour will vary from clear to blue. It is called an eruption cyst and occurs with about 40% of tooth eruptions. It occurs when both baby teeth and adult teeth erupt. The larger the tooth the more likely the swelling. It requires no treatment and resolves upon eruption.

Will It Affect My Babies Behaviour?

Growing and losing teeth is normal for all humans and happens on and off for 21 years of life. Historically erupting teeth or "Teething" has been blamed for causing deaths, epilepsy, coughs, colds, diarrhoea etc.

Before they erupt teeth will not cause babies pain or discomfort. However when a tooth is about to emerge or break through the gum your baby may be distressed. Their gum may be sore and tender, and may appear red and swollen. This may make your baby irritable and choosy about their food. They may dribble more and appear quite restless. Infections, rashes and diarrhoea also seem to have some association with teething.

To ease this pain try:

- rubbing the gums with a finger
- a clean cold teething ring may be soothing
- a rusk to chew on may help
- paracetamol may be given, not aspirin, to help ease the pain
- teething gels are available from the chemist, but these would have a short term effect

Remember this discomfort will only last 1-3 days. If your baby is very distressed and behaving in an unusual manner don't assume the problem is teething, seek a second opinion

Why Are Baby Teeth Important?

Baby teeth have several important functions. They:-

1. Assist with growth and development of the jaws and facial musculature
2. Improve mastication through more efficient digestion of food
3. Enable speech patterns to develop
4. Provide a pleasing appearance
5. Encourage the child's swallowing pattern to develop. An infant swallows by sealing the tongue against the upper lip whereas adults swallow by sealing their tongue against the hard palate behind upper incisor teeth
6. Hold space for the developing adult teeth. Premature loss of deciduous teeth can disturb the eruption of adult teeth. The most common cause is tooth decay. The situation is worse if the tooth is removed and not replaced. It is important to place fillings in baby teeth to prevent this loss of space. If a front tooth is lost the midline of the teeth will move to one side.

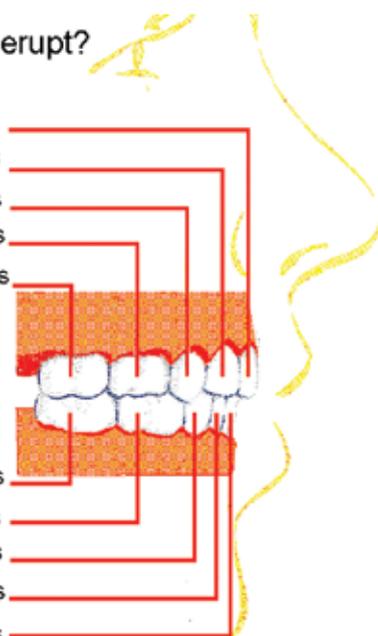
When do first teeth erupt?

Upper Teeth

central incisors 8-12 mths
lateral incisors 9-13 mths
canines 16-22 mths
first molars 13-19 mths
second molars 25-33 mths

Lower Teeth

second molars 23-31 mths
first molars 14-28 mths
canines 17-23 mths
lateral incisors 10-16 mths
central incisors 6-10 mths



Nursing Bottle Caries

This is an unfortunate form of rampant decay occurring in infants. Recent Australian studies show a 5% to 15% prevalence. There is widespread destruction of the deciduous teeth, most commonly the four upper incisors. It may be so severe that only root stumps remain.

It is caused by a prolonged use of bottles containing milk (breast or cows), fruit juice, vitamin enriched syrups or sweetened water. Sugar or honey sweetened pacifiers also play a role.

Decay occurs when bacteria have access to sugar. They produce acids which rot the teeth. The longer the exposure to sugar the more decay. It is worse at night since saliva is reduced so the acids are not washed away.

Prevention

This is a totally preventable disease. Do not give your baby a bottle to help it sleep at night or naptime. Do not allow your child access to a bottle or sweetened dummy for long periods of the day. Use the bottle only for food or drink, not as a comforter. If you must give your baby a bottle to aid their sleep place only plain boiled water in it, and remove the bottle once your baby is asleep.

Cleaning Their Teeth

Although it may be quite difficult it is important to clean your child's teeth everyday. When the teeth first appear use a clean damp cloth or piece of gauze to wipe their teeth clean. A toothbrush can be introduced by 12 months of age.

Initially use the brush without any toothpaste. Toothpaste can be introduced when the child has learnt to spit properly. Adult toothpaste may have an unpleasant taste for a child so use a children's toothpaste.

Also, since children swallow much of the toothpaste given to them use a low fluoride toothpaste e.g. Colgate Junior.

Parental supervision is required up to 8 years of age when a child develops the manual dexterity required to clean their teeth

When Should I Take My Child To The Dentist?

Encourage your child to attend when one of its parents does. This gets them used to the dental environment. By 3-4 years of age the child may sit in the chair for orientation, if co-operative a check-up may be done. Early dental visits prevent minor problems becoming major ones

Advice

- make appointments for early in the day so your child is not tired
- avoid using negative words such as drill, hurt, needle
- answer questions honestly, but not too specifically
- treat the visits as routine, don't make it the highlight of the day

Thumb And Finger Sucking

This is a normal activity for babies, some even do it in the womb. It helps develop the jaws and muscles of the mouth. It does not indicate stress. It helps the baby to explore their new world. Thumb and finger sucking only becomes a problem if it continues after the adult teeth erupt.

Dummies

Similar to finger and thumb sucking. Keep the dummy as clean as possible as it is a potential source of infection. Do not dip into liquids e.g. honey. Check it regularly for signs of fatigue e.g. splitting

Trauma

Often occurs when infants are learning to walk. If a tooth or the gum is damaged seek dental assistance immediately. If a baby tooth is knocked out do not re-implant it. It may damage the developing adult tooth or fuse to the bone and prevent eruption of the permanent tooth. If it is an adult tooth put it straight back in place, so long as it is not too dirty. If it must be washed rinse it with milk and re-implant it. If you can't replace it store the tooth in milk or wrap it in gladwrap and seek dental assistance immediately. If the tooth is broken try to find the fragments to make sure they are not inhaled. A tooth that is re-implanted within 30 minutes has a 90% chance of survival.