Let's Talk About...

Teething

Teething is a normal process for every child. Teething does not cause ear infections, loss of appetite, diarrhea, fever, or cold symptoms. If your child has a fever, it is important that he see a doctor to find out why.

A baby's first teeth are formed during pregnancy. For that reason, it is important that an expecting mother eat food that have plenty of calcium and vitamin D. Calcium and vitamin D help make healthy bones and teeth.

The first tooth usually grows in the lower jaw between 6 to 10 months of age. When a tooth is about to come through the gum, you can see a small bump under the gum. You may notice your baby drools a bit and chews a lot when the first tooth starts to grow.

First, the two bottom front teeth (central incisors) come in. Four to eight weeks later, the four upper teeth (central and lateral incisors) come in. A month later, the two lower incisors follow. The first molars (in the back of the mouth) arrive around one year and can cause discomfort as they come in.

Babies use their early teeth to bite, not to chew. However, babies start learning to chew as soon as they can put their toys and hands into their mouths. Babies need appropriate foods for gumming until the back teeth come in. Peeled pieces of apple, hard crusts, and teething biscuits or Zwiebachs® are good choices.

Once your child has two or more teeth next to each other, watch for bits of food trapped between the teeth. If you see a piece of food caught between the teeth, remove it. Encourage your child to start drinking plain water rather than sweet drinks. Sweet drinks can cause cavities.

How can I help my teething child?

While most children have no problem with their first teeth, some children experience mild discomfort.

- Gum massage can ease the discomfort. Find the irritated or swollen gum. Massage the gum for two minutes or so. You can repeat this often. A piece of ice rubbed on the area may also numb the irritation.
- Teething rings are a useful way to massage the gums. Most children like them cold, not frozen.
- A clean, wet washcloth that has been in the freezer for thirty minutes is also handy. Cold items on the gum help. Small ice chips, popsicle shavings, or a frozen banana cut into small pieces may help.

What about breast-feeding?

Sore gums may cause your breast-feeding baby to bite while nursing. This usually lasts for one to two days. To soothe your baby's sore gums, offer your baby a cool washcloth to chew on just before feeding. Babies cannot bite while they are actively nursing. If your baby does bite, stop the feeding and firmly say "no." If these suggestions do not work, talk to your doctor about what else you can do.

How do I care for baby teeth?

Baby-bottle tooth decay is found in children who are given a bottle of milk or juice to nap with or take to bed. Children who are given a bottle as a pacifier also tend to get baby-bottle tooth decay. Never dip a pacifier in sugar, honey, or anything sweet or sticky. Do not allow your breast-fed baby to sleep throughout the night while still attached to the breast.

For more information, see the handout ***Let's Talk About… Baby bottle tooth decay***. To keep your baby's teeth from decaying, brush or wipe her teeth with a washcloth after her nighttime feeding.

What if my child has a tooth injury?

A tooth or jaw injury is serious, whether it is a baby or permanent tooth. A broken or chipped tooth may injure a child's tongue or lip during a fall. If your child has chipped tooth she needs to see a dentist. If your child has a tooth that is completely knocked out of the mouth or knocked out of place, find the tooth and take it and your child immediately to the dentist. The dentist will decide whether to put the tooth back in or do something else to protect the remaining teeth, jaw or both.

When does a child need dental visits?

Usually, the first trip to the dentist should happen between two and three years of age. Schedule regular check-ups every six months. Help your child develop good tooth care habits at an early age.

Here are some reasons to care for your child's teeth and schedule regular dental visits:

- First teeth must last for six years or more. They maintain proper spacing for later teeth and help the jaw grow properly.
- Teeth can affect the way a child speaks. Missing teeth can make it difficult for a child to speak clearly.
- Cavities that are ignored can be so uncomfortable that children are unable to focus on activities like school or play.

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