

# Oral health for babies and children

## BABY TEETH ARE IMPORTANT!

### They help your child:

- Chew and eat
- Learn to speak properly
- Hold space for adult teeth
- Develop self-esteem
- Be healthy
- Smile



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*Early childhood caries (ECC) is one of the most common, preventable diseases of childhood. It is a severe, rapidly developing form of tooth decay that affects infants and children.*

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### ECC can be caused by:

- Going to sleep or walking around with a bottle or sippy cup containing anything but water
- Too much sugar in your baby's diet
- Not cleaning your baby's teeth
- Dipping a pacifier in anything sweet
- Long-term use of sweetened medication
- Germs passed from you to your baby

### It can lead to:

- Pain
- Infection
- Difficulty eating and sleeping
- Speech problems
- Costly dental treatment
- Poor health
- Higher risk of tooth decay in later years

### You can help prevent tooth decay

Clean your baby's mouth every day, even before teeth appear. Use a clean, soft, damp cloth to wipe gums, insides of cheeks and the roof of the mouth. As soon as teeth appear, brush them gently using a small, soft toothbrush and water. Brush 30 minutes after each feeding or at least twice a day.

Children under three years of age should use only water or a rice grain-sized amount of non-fluoridated toothpaste unless otherwise advised by their oral health professional. A green pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste is suggested for children three years of age and older if they are able to spit.

Children up to six years of age are not able to brush their teeth properly, so you will have to do it for them. Let them have a turn brushing when you are done. Let your child watch when you brush your own teeth. When your child's teeth are touching, start flossing them once a day.

Lift your child's lip each time you brush to check their teeth. If you see white chalky spots or brown spots, take your baby to see a dentist.

### First birthday - first dental visit

All babies should visit a dentist or a dental hygienist by one year of age. They will make sure everything is healthy in your baby's mouth and will answer any questions you may have.



## Did you know?

When actively breastfeeding, the tongue's position around the nipple and the nipple's location in the back of the mouth protect the teeth because milk goes directly down the baby's throat.

## How food affects the risk of tooth decay

Germ in your child's mouth react with sugars in food and drinks to form a mild acid. Over time, this acid can make holes or cavities in teeth. The more often your child's teeth are exposed to sugar, the more damage it can do.

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*Breastmilk, formula, cow's milk and 100 per cent juice all contain naturally occurring sugar that can harm a baby's teeth if left to sit in the mouth.*

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## To reduce the risk of cavities (tooth decay):

- Limit the amount and frequency of sugary, sticky snacks and drinks
- Avoid giving your baby a bottle or sippy cup in bed, unless it only contains water
- Take the breast or bottle out of your baby's mouth as soon as your baby falls asleep to prevent milk from pooling in the mouth which can increase the risk of cavities
- When your baby is old enough, help them use a cup instead of a bottle
- If your child uses a pacifier, avoid dipping it in anything sweet, including syrups, sugar or honey
- Avoid putting your child's spoon or pacifier in your mouth or sharing other eating utensils (adults have cavity causing germs which can be passed to your child)
- Brush your own teeth at least twice a day and visit the dentist regularly to prevent spreading germs
- Read the ingredient list on food labels; if the first few ingredients include molasses, honey, syrup, corn sweeteners, dextrose, fructose, glucose or sucrose, this may be a food or beverage that is too high in sugar
- Avoid using a mesh feeding bag as a teether because it increases the length of time the sugars in the food are on your baby's teeth
- Limit sweets to meal times (there is more saliva in the mouth at meal times and that helps to dilute the sugars and wash them away)
- Try to brush your child's teeth 30 minutes after meals and snacks or rinse your child's mouth with water



## Healthy food for healthy teeth

Eating from the four food groups is good for teeth, gums and health. This is important for your growing child.

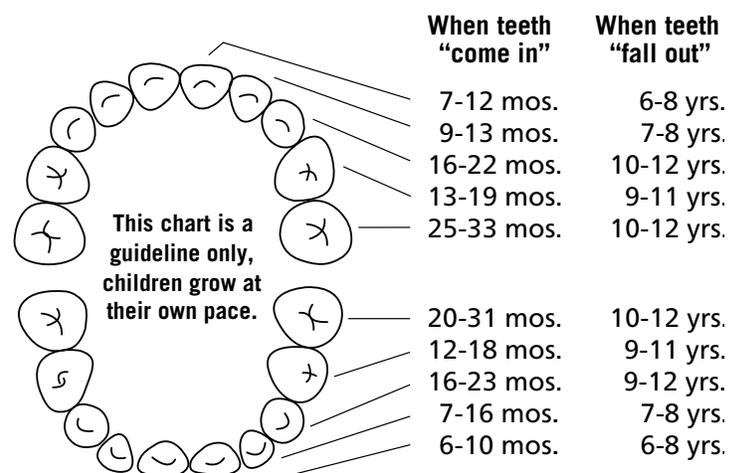
Try these “teeth friendly” snacks as your child gets older:
Beans
Cheese
Cottage cheese
Dry, unsweetened cereal
Fruit
Fruit smoothies made with frozen fruit and milk
Hard boiled eggs
Milk
Plain rice cakes
Vegetables
Yogurt
Whole grain crackers, pita or bagels
Avoid:
Rolled up fruit snacks or fruit gummies
Dried fruit, like raisins
Candy
Soda
Sports drinks
Sugared gum



## Teething is a natural process

Your baby is born with a set of 20 teeth hidden under the gums. Teething is the process of these teeth working their way through the gums.

The first teeth usually appear between six and ten months, with the rest following over the next two to three years. This is only a guide – each child is different.



## Common signs of teething

When children are teething they may:

- Drool
- Be cranky and irritable
- Have red cheeks and red, swollen gums
- Chew on things

*Do not confuse teething with illness.*

Getting new teeth does not make babies or children sick. Do not ignore a fever. If you aren't sure whether your child is teething or sick, check with your child's doctor.



## Where to get help

If you think your child has a cavity, go to the dentist.

If you cannot afford to take your child to the dentist, make a screening appointment for your child at a York Region Public Health dental clinic. Clinic locations include **Markham, Newmarket, Richmond Hill, Sutton** and **Vaughan**.

Your child may qualify to receive dental treatment at no cost through the **Healthy Smiles Ontario (HSO) program**, if you meet financial eligibility criteria and they are 17 years of age or under.

For more information, to make an appointment at a York Region Public Health dental clinic, or to apply online for the HSO program, visit [york.ca/dental](http://york.ca/dental) or call **905-895-4512** or **1-800-735-6625**.

## Tips to help your baby cope with teething

- Offer your breastfeeding baby the breast for pain relief and comfort
- Rub their gums with a clean finger
- Give your baby a hard, smooth object such as a teething ring, which can feel good on their gums
- Give your baby a clean, wet washcloth that has been chilled or frozen
- Don't rub teething gel on baby's gums; they may swallow it or it may numb the back of their throat and cause a choking hazard
- Don't give teething biscuits because they may contain added or hidden sugars

If your baby is still unhappy, your dentist, doctor or pharmacist can suggest an over-the-counter pain medication



To speak with the York Region Public Health Dental Program, call **1-800-735-6625** or visit [york.ca/dental](http://york.ca/dental) for more information.



### **PUBLIC HEALTH**

1-800-361-5653

TTY: 1-866-512-6228

[york.ca/dental](http://york.ca/dental)