



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



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

Start cleaning 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 with a small, soft toothbrush and water. Brush after each feeding, or at least twice a day.

Fluoride toothpaste is suggested for children aged three and older if they are able to spit. Children up to age six 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 baby's lip often to check the teeth. If you see white chalky spots or brown spots, take your baby to see a dentist.

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

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

ECC can be caused by:

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



Did you know?

The position of the tongue around the nipple and the location of the nipple in the back of the mouth protect the teeth while the baby is actively breast-feeding because milk goes directly down the throat.

How food affects the risk of tooth decay

Germs 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.

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

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 contains only water
- Take the breast or bottle out of your baby's mouth as soon as your baby falls asleep or the milk will pool in the mouth (pooling of the milk in the mouth can increase the risk of cavities)
- When old enough, help your baby to use a cup instead of a bottle
- Avoid putting your baby's spoon or soother in your mouth (adults have cavity causing germs which can be passed to your baby)
- Brush your own teeth at least twice a day and visit the dentist regularly to prevent spreading germs
- If your child uses a soother, avoid dipping it in anything sweet, including syrups, sugar or honey
- 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 this helps to dilute the sugars and wash them away)
- Try to brush your baby's teeth after meals and snacks or rinse your baby'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.

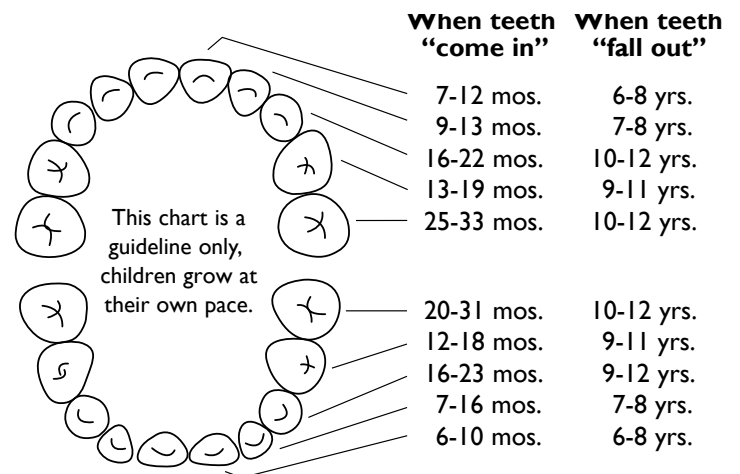
Try these “teeth friendly” snacks as your child gets older:
Beans
Cheese
Cottage cheese
Dry cereal, such as Cheerios® or Shreddies®
Fruit
Fruit smoothies, made with 100% juice
Hard boiled eggs
Milk
Plain rice cakes
Vegetables
Yogurt
Whole grain crackers
Whole wheat pita or bagels
Avoid:
Rolled up fruit 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.



Tips to help your baby cope with teething

- Offer your breastfeeding baby the breast for pain relief and comfort
- Rub the gums with a clean finger
- Give your baby a hard, smooth object such as a teething ring, which can feel good on your baby's gums
- Give your baby a clean, wet washcloth that has been chilled or frozen
- Don't use a teething gel that is rubbed on baby's gums (babies may swallow it or it may numb the back of the throat causing 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 medicine to ease the pain.

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 and you do not have dental insurance, make a screening appointment for your child at one of our clinics.

Your child, aged 0-17 years, may qualify to receive dental treatment at no cost through the **Children in Need of Treatment (CINOT)** or **Healthy Smiles Ontario (HSO)** programs, if you meet eligibility criteria.

For more information or to make an appointment at a York Region Community and Health Services dental clinic, please call **905-895-4512** or **1-800-735-6625**. You can also visit our website at www.york.ca/teeth.

York Region dental clinic locations

Newmarket

22 Prospect Street
Newmarket

Markham

4261 Highway 7 East
Unionville

Richmond Hill

50 High Tech Road, 2nd floor
Richmond Hill



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