



## Dental Care for Babies and Toddlers

### Tooth Development:

- A baby's primary teeth, also known as baby teeth or deciduous teeth, begin to form 5 weeks after conception
- By the time a baby is born, all 20 primary teeth are present in the jawbone but under the gums
- The age from which primary teeth begin to erupt varies greatly and it is not uncommon for a difference of 6 to 12 months
- The bottom front teeth erupt at around 6-10 months. These are usually followed by either the top front or the side bottom front teeth
- Following the eruption of these teeth, the top front side teeth will usually appear at around 9-13 months. This is followed by the molars at 13-19 months
- The eye teeth or canines are the next teeth to appear. The second molars are the final teeth that appear and normally a baby will have all its primary teeth by the age of 2 ½ - 3 years

### First dental visit -

- A child's first visit to the dentist should be as early as can be done with cooperation from around the age of 1 and no later than 3 years
- Parents are advised to take their children to the dentist at an early age to help prevent any problems, which may occur as they grow and develop
- Children who visit the dentist regularly from an early age are much less likely to experience dental problems during their childhood and suffer from a fear of dentists
- It is important for parents to make dental visits enjoyable for their children. Parents can help their child feel comfortable by making sure children don't hear scary stories about dental visits. Don't let them know if you feel any anxiety about going to the dentist yourself

- If your tap water is not fluoridated, discuss with your dentist the need for topical fluoride and/or fluoride supplements

#### Diet –

- Do not put any sugar or other sweeteners in babies' bottles as they can cause decay. If your baby needs a drink between feeds preferably use fluoridated tap water
- Babies and toddlers should be encouraged to drink where possible fluoridated tap water in place of sugary soft drinks and juices
- Give babies and toddlers a balanced, healthy diet with plenty of calcium and vegetables, and keep sugary snacks to a minimum
- The most common dental decay problem seen in infants and toddlers is nursing decay. Bottle and breast-fed babies are both susceptible. Babies left with a bottle as a pacifier and those who are frequently nursed, especially at night, run the danger of bottle or nursing decay due to the prolonged exposure to milk (human milk is no exception) or juice
- At about 18 months start your baby drinking from a cup as this reduces the time decay-producing sugars are in contact with the teeth

#### Cleaning -

- Begin tooth cleaning as soon as the baby teeth erupt. This can be done with a moist cloth. A toothbrush can be used as soon as it is tolerated, usually between 1-2 years, but without toothpaste
- Introduce your baby to toothpaste from around two years of age or as directed by your dentist
- Use a pea-size amount of fluoridated toothpaste that's been formulated for children, on a small soft toothbrush
- Children usually require assistance and encouragement with cleaning teeth up to six or seven years of age
- Toddlers should be encouraged to spit the toothpaste out

#### Teething –

- Most babies have at least a partially developed set of primary (baby) teeth, which begin to appear as early as six months after birth
- Most children have their full set of primary teeth in place by age three

- As their teeth come through, some babies may become irritable, fussy, sleepless and lose their appetite or dribble more than usual
- The gums may become red, swollen and if pressed, they may feel hard and pointed
- A rise in temperature, redness, pain and swelling can accompany teething. Additionally, restlessness, sleeplessness at night, infections rashes and diarrhoea have some association with teething, however it's important to check with your doctor if these symptoms persist
- As a tooth comes through the gum, a blue eruption cyst may develop. The tooth will eventually rupture this watery sac as it comes through and eruption cysts are usually harmless and should be left alone
- Some babies may have sore or tender gums when their teeth begin to erupt. Gently rubbing the gum with a clean finger, a small cool spoon or a cool wet cloth can provide some relief
- If there is a lot of pain, your dentist or doctor may recommend a children's pain reliever
- To help soothe the irritation that teething can cause, offer your baby a teething ring to chew on
- Babies should not be offered a 'comfort' bottle to chew upon as the contents could contribute to nursing decay

The basic principles that babies/toddlers/children need to follow in order to help prevent dental decay include:

- Enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods, especially those rich in calcium and low in acids and sugars
- Enjoy healthy snacks
- Drink plenty of tap water – especially if fluoridated
- Brush gently and thoroughly with a fluoride toothpaste (with a low concentration for children up to 7 years) and a soft compact head toothbrush
- Clean your teeth at least twice a day after meals
- Have regular dental checkups – don't wait for a problem to occur
- Dental checkups start with toddlers