

TIPS ON TEETHING



Many parents wonder what to expect when their babies begin teething. Although newborns usually have no visible teeth, most have at least a partially developed set of primary (baby) teeth. Some teeth may appear as early as six months after birth. During the first few years of life, all 20 of the primary teeth will erupt through the gums.

As their teeth erupt, some babies become fussy, sleepless, or irritable. Loss of appetite or drooling more than usual also can be signs of teething. Although teething was once thought to be responsible for fevers, diarrhea and rashes, doctors today generally agree that teething alone does not produce such symptoms.

If your child continues to be cranky and uncomfortable or shows signs of a fever while teething, call your physician.

THE TEETHING CYCLE

A baby's four front teeth (the incisors) usually are the first to appear. Some babies experience sore or tender gums as teeth begin to erupt. To comfort a teething child, gently massage the gums with: (1) a clean finger; (2) a small, chilled spoon or teething ring; or (3) a clean, moist gauze pad or cloth. Your dentist or pediatrician may recommend a pacifier or a special "numbing" salve for the gums.

As a tooth erupts, a watery sac called an eruption cyst may develop. The tooth will eventually rupture the sac as it pushes through the gums. Eruption cysts usually are harmless and should be left alone. The chewing edge of the incisors may have three small bumps, called mamelons, which normally wear off with use.

Start with no toothpaste; then work up to a pea-sized amount after age two. When the child's teeth begin to erupt, brush them with a small, soft-bristled, toothbrush and a little warm water to help brush away the plaque. Before age two, you may use a very small amount (a smear, or about the size of a grain of rice) of fluoridated toothpaste with adult supervision. After age two, only a pea-sized amount of toothpaste is needed. Because children age six or younger do not have fully developed swallowing reflex, make certain they are spitting the toothpaste out. Continue to brush your child's teeth until good habits and brushing dexterity are established. (About age eight, or when they can double-knot their shoe laces are good measures). After that, supervise and "check-up" on your child's brushing to make sure it is thorough.

Most children have their full set of primary teeth in place by age three. The jaws grow steadily to make room for the 32 permanent (adult) teeth, the first of which begins to appear about age six or seven. The primary teeth are "shed" as the permanent teeth under them erupt. The last of the permanent teeth generally appear between ages 17 and 21.

FIRST BIRTHDAY IS DENTAL CHECK-UP TIME

Take your child to see the dentist by his or her first birthday, even though this may seem early. The American Dental Association recommends that a child be seen by a dentist six months after the first tooth erupts or by age one, whichever comes first. The dentist or hygienist can properly demonstrate how to properly clean the child's teeth, discuss how to prevent early childhood caries (ECC), and make dietary and fluoride recommendations. The first dental exam also allows the dentist to spot growth and development defects that generally are easier to correct at an early age. Regular dental visits and good oral care at home truly will give your baby something to smile about.

