A Healthy Mouth for Your Baby

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
National Institutes of Health
National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research

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Before your baby is born—

What you eat when you are pregnant is important. Eating right will help you and your growing baby stay healthy. Follow your doctor's advice for eating the right foods and taking vitamins.

It's also time to think about how you'll feed your baby. Remember, breast-feeding is best!

A Healthy Mouth for Your Baby

1. Protect your baby's teeth with fluoride.

2. Check and clean your baby's teeth.

3. Feed your baby healthy food.

4. Prevent baby bottle tooth decay.

5. Take your child to the dentist.

"What are you doing?" asked Ann. Ann and her friend, Maria, were watching Maria's children play.

"I'm cleaning my baby's teeth," said Maria.

"But your baby hardly has any teeth!" said Ann.

"Yes, but my dentist said there are things I can do to keep my baby from getting tooth decay," said Maria.

"But don't baby teeth just fall out?" asked Ann.

"Yes, but tooth decay can cause pain for the baby. And baby teeth hold space for adult teeth," said Maria.

"What else did the dentist say?" asked Ann.

"She told me how fluoride protects teeth. She also said to feed my baby healthy foods and not to put my baby to bed with a bottle," said Maria.

"When do you have to start taking care of a baby's teeth?" asked Ann.

"As soon as they come in. Teeth can decay as soon as they appear in the mouth," said Maria.

"I'll have to start thinking of those things soon!" laughed Ann.

1. Protect Your Baby's Teeth With Fluoride

Fluoride (said like *floor-eyed*) protects teeth from tooth decay and helps heal early decay.

- Fluoride is in the drinking water of many towns and cities.

Ask your dentist or doctor if your water has fluoride in it. If it doesn't, talk to your dentist or doctor about giving you a prescription for fluoride drops for your baby.

2. Check and Clean Your Baby's Teeth

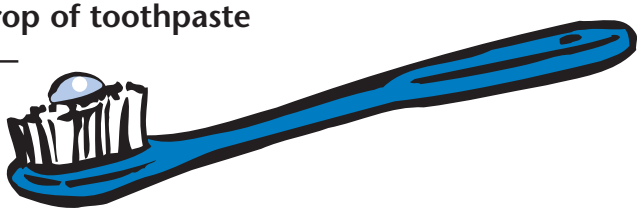
Check your baby's teeth

Healthy teeth should be all one color. If you see spots or stains on the teeth, take your baby to your dentist.

Clean your baby's teeth

as soon as they come in with a clean, soft cloth or a baby's toothbrush. Clean the teeth at least once a day. It's best to clean them right before bedtime.

At about age 2, most of your child's teeth will be in. Now you can start brushing them with a small drop of fluoride toothpaste. Use a drop of toothpaste about as big as this—



Young children cannot get their teeth clean by themselves. Until they are 7 or 8 years old, you will need to help them brush. Try brushing their teeth first and then letting them finish. And be sure that you put the toothpaste on the brush—use only a pea-sized amount of toothpaste.

3. Feed Your Baby Healthy Food

Choose foods that do not have a lot of sugar in them. Give your child fruits and vegetables instead of candy and cookies.

4. Prevent Baby Bottle Tooth Decay

- **Do not put your baby to bed with a bottle at night or at nap time.** (*If you put your baby to bed with a bottle, fill it only with* **water**.)

Milk, formula, juices, and other sweet drinks such as soda all have sugar in them. Sucking on a bottle filled with liquids that have sugar in them can cause tooth decay. Decayed teeth can cause pain and can cost a lot to fill.

- **During the day, do not give your baby a bottle filled with sweet drinks to use like a pacifier.**
- **If your baby uses a pacifier, do not dip it in anything sweet like sugar or honey.**
- **Near his first birthday, you should teach your child to drink from a cup instead of a bottle.**

5. Take Your Child To the Dentist

Ask your dentist when to bring your child in for his first visit. Usually, the dentist will want to see a child by his first birthday. At this first visit, your dentist can quickly check your child's teeth.

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NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF DENTAL AND CRANIOFACIAL RESEARCH

National Oral Health Information Clearinghouse
1 NOHIC Way
Bethesda, MD 20892-3500
301-402-7364
www.nidcr.nih.gov

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