



British  
Dental Health  
Foundation

The British Dental Health Foundation is an independent, UK-based charity dedicated to promoting the benefits of good oral health to the public throughout the world.

The Foundation promotes three key messages:

- brush your teeth for two minutes twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste.
- cut down on how often you have sugary foods and drinks.
- visit your dentist regularly, as often as they recommend.

Look for our 'Approved' symbol on oral health products. You can trust these products to live up to the claims on their packaging.

The Dental Helpline is the Foundation's own confidential advice service. Qualified dental professionals are available to answer your questions personally from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday. Or you can send us a question by email from our website at any time.



Dental  
Helpline  
0845 063 1188  
[www.dentalhealth.org](http://www.dentalhealth.org)



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Understanding Life.

*It costs the Foundation £9 for every enquiry we answer. If you would like to make a donation, please send a cheque to the address below, or phone 01788 539793 to donate by credit or debit card.*

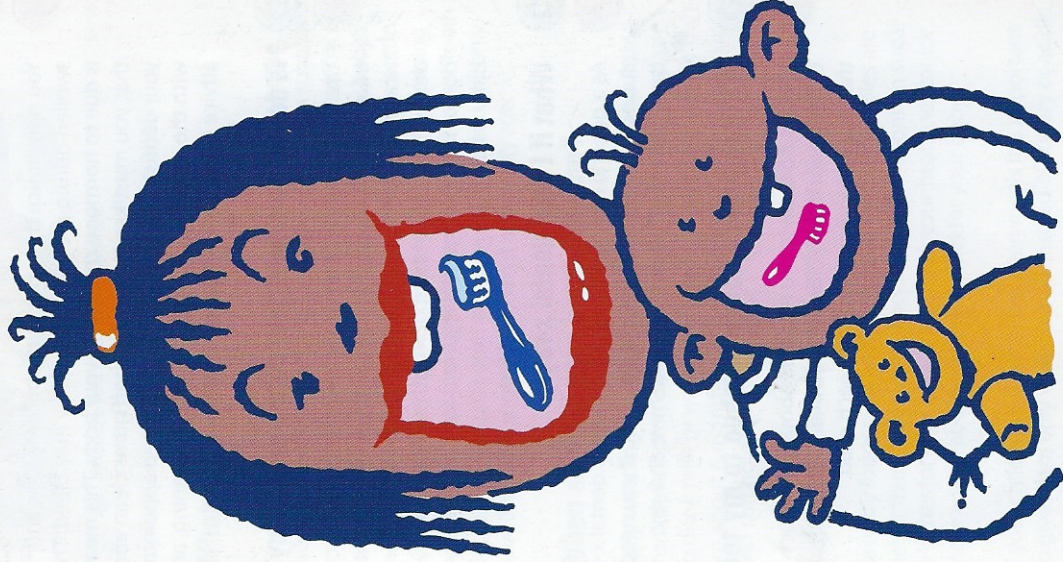
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Tell me about

# Dental care for mother and baby







## **Q** Do I need to see my dentist during pregnancy?

**A** Yes. Because of hormone changes during pregnancy, some women's dental health needs more care during this time. For example, you may notice that your gums appear to bleed more easily.

## **Q** Why are my gums bleeding?

**A** You may notice that your gums become sore and swollen during pregnancy, and they may bleed. This is due to hormone changes in your body. This means that you must keep your teeth and gums clean and visit your dentist regularly. You may also need appointments with the dental hygienist for thorough cleaning, and advice on caring for your teeth at home.

## **Q** Is dental treatment safe during pregnancy?

**A** Yes. There should be no problems with routine treatment. If you are not sure what your treatment would involve, talk about all the options with your dentist. The Department of Health advises that you do not have amalgam fillings replaced until after your baby is born.

## **Q** What if I need dental x-rays?

**A** As a general rule, dentists prefer to avoid dental x-rays during pregnancy if possible. However, if you need root canal treatment you may need to have an x-ray.

## **Q** Will pregnancy cause damage to my teeth?

**A** There is no truth in the rumours about pregnancy causing tooth problems through a lack of calcium, or that you will lose one tooth for each child.



## **Q** What about smoking and alcohol in pregnancy?



Smoking and drinking in pregnancy can lead to an underweight baby and also affect your unborn baby's dental health. An underweight baby has a greater risk of having poor teeth because of the tooth enamel not being formed properly. It is worth remembering that the adult teeth are already growing in the jaws below the baby teeth when your baby is born. So some babies whose mothers smoke and drink in pregnancy will have badly formed adult teeth too.



## **Q** What about diet during pregnancy?



When you are pregnant you must have a healthy, balanced diet that has all the vitamins and minerals you and your baby need.

You need to have a good diet so that your baby's teeth can develop. Calcium in particular is important to produce strong bones and healthy teeth. Calcium is in milk, cheese and other dairy products.

Women who suffer from morning sickness may want to eat 'little and often'. If you are often sick, rinse your mouth afterwards with plain water to prevent the acid in your vomit attacking your teeth. Try to avoid sugary and acidic foods and drinks between meals. This will protect your teeth against decay.



## **Q** When will my baby's teeth appear?



Your baby should start teething at around 6 months old and will continue until all 20 baby teeth come through. At around 6 years old, the adult teeth will begin to appear. This will continue until all the adult teeth, except the wisdom teeth, have come through at around 14 years old.

For more information, please see our 'Tell me about' leaflet *Children's teeth*.





## Q Is teething painful?

Most children do suffer some teething pains. Babies may have a high temperature when they are teething and their cheeks may look red and be warm to the touch.

There are special teething gels that you can use to help reduce the pain. There are some that contain a mild analgesic (painkiller). You can apply the gel using your finger, and gently massage it onto your baby's gums.

Teething rings can also help to soothe your baby. Certain teething rings can be cooled in the fridge, which may help. But, as teething pains can vary, it is best to check with your dentist or health visitor.

## Q When should I take my baby to the dentist for the first time?

It is best to discuss this with your dentist first, but you could take your baby to your own routine check-ups. This can help the baby to get used to the surroundings. Your dentist will be able to offer advice and prescribe medicines for teething pains, and will be happy to answer any questions you may have. The baby's own check-ups can start any time from about 6 months or from when the teeth start to appear.

## Q Does breast feeding affect my baby's teeth?

Breast milk is the best food for babies, and it is recommended that you just give your baby breast milk during the first six months of its life.

At six months old, babies can start eating some solid foods. You should still keep breast feeding, or give breast milk substitutes (or both), after the first six months.

There needs to be more research to see whether, in some cases, the natural sugars in breast milk cause tooth decay in babies. However, it is widely accepted that breast milk is the best food for your baby. If you keep your baby's teeth clean, tooth decay is unlikely to be a problem.



Introduce your baby to the sights and sounds of the dental practice at an early age

## Q What about bottle feeding?

When feeding with a bottle, you must sterilize the bottle properly. Some breast milk substitutes do contain sugar and you should clean your baby's teeth after the last feed. Try to leave an hour after the feed before cleaning your baby's teeth. Never add sugar or put sugary drinks into the bottle. Milk and water are the best drinks for teeth. Bottle feeding with drinks containing sugar can lead to 'bottle caries' (tooth decay). A baby is not born with a sweet tooth and will only have a taste for sugar if it is given it at an early age.

## Q When should I stop bottle feeding?

Early weaning from the bottle can help stop your baby from developing dental problems. Try to get your baby to drink milk or water from a special cup by the time they are about 6 months old, or when they are able to sit up and can hold things on their own.

## Q What solid foods are better for my baby?

Savory foods such as cheese, pasta and vegetables are better than sweet foods. Food that doesn't contain sugar is better for your baby's teeth. Ask your health visitor for more advice about a balanced diet for your baby.

If your child has a drink in between meals it is important to give them only water or milk instead of sugary or acidic drinks, which can cause decay.





## Q Will my baby need fluoride supplements?

Fluoride does help to strengthen teeth. However, as fluoride is naturally found in some water supplies, it is important to ask your dentist whether your baby needs supplements. If so, supplements can start at about 6 months.

## Q When should I start cleaning my baby's teeth?

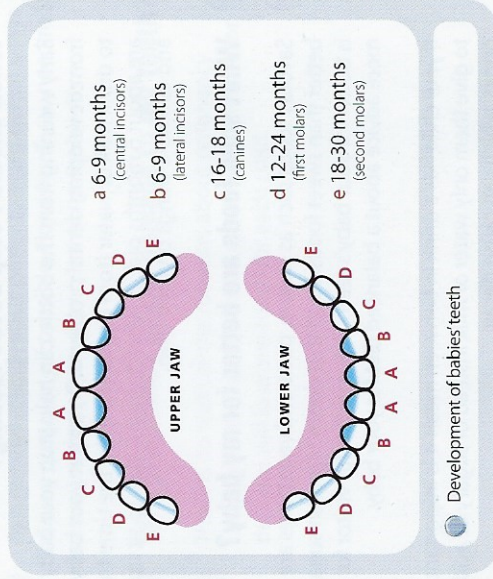
Babies are obviously not able to clean their own teeth, and children will need help to make sure that they clean them properly until they are about 7 years old. As soon as teething has started you should start cleaning your child's teeth.

## Q How should I clean my baby's teeth?

As soon as the first baby teeth begin to appear you should start to clean them.

At first you may find it easier to use a piece of clean gauze or cloth wrapped around your forefinger. As more teeth appear, you will need to use a baby toothbrush.

Use a smear of fluoride toothpaste and gently massage it around the teeth and gums.



Development of babies' teeth

It can be easier to clean their teeth if you cradle your baby's head in your arms in front of you.

As the child gets older it may be difficult to do it this way, but you can gradually give more responsibility for cleaning their teeth to the child. It is important to clean teeth twice a day with a toothpaste that contains at least 1000ppm (parts per million) of fluoride. After 3 years old, use a toothpaste that contains 1350ppm to 1500ppm.

Check with your dentist or health visitor if you are unsure about how to look after your baby's teeth.

## Q What if my baby sucks its thumb or needs a dummy?

If you can, avoid using a dummy and discourage thumb sucking. These can both eventually cause problems with how the teeth grow and develop. And this may need treatment with a brace when the child gets older.

If your baby needs a dummy, there are 'orthodontic' soothers or dummies that reduce the risk of these problems. So if your baby does want to use a dummy, make sure you choose an orthodontic one. Look for products that carry the British Dental Health Foundation approved logo.

Never dip your baby's dummy or teething ring into fruit syrups, honey, fruit juices or anything containing sugars, particularly at bedtime. The harmful sugars and acids can attack your baby's newly formed teeth and cause decay.

## Q What if my baby damages a tooth?

If your child damages a tooth, contact your dentist straight away. A damaged tooth will often discolour over time.

If the damage happens outside normal opening hours, your dentist will have emergency cover. Phone the surgery anyway to find out who to call.