

Keep them smiling!
Caring for your baby's teeth

Protect your baby's smile

Tooth care starts at birth, and even earlier.

Healthy baby teeth are important. They help children eat well, speak clearly and prevent adult teeth from growing in crooked. Some of your child's baby teeth need to stay in their mouth until they are 12 years old!

As a parent, your role is to keep your child's baby teeth clean and free of tooth decay. Tooth decay can be very painful. It is a disease that may worsen. Some babies may even need to be hospitalized to fix their teeth.

You can prevent tooth decay in your child's teeth by following a few simple steps.



ActNowBC

British Columbia Dental Association
400 – 1765 West 8th Avenue
Vancouver, B.C. V6J 5C6
T:604-736-7202
kidsmiles.ca



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Tips for Baby Tooth Care

Are you pregnant?

It's important that your teeth are healthy while you are pregnant, as well as after the birth of your child.

Tooth decay is caused by bacteria in the mouth. You will want to keep your teeth clean to avoid passing bacteria on to your baby. Brush daily with fluoride toothpaste, floss and see your dentist. This is a good time to talk to your dentist about caring for your baby's teeth in their first year.

Poor nutrition in pregnancy also increases the risk for tooth decay. When pregnant, be sure to include sources of calcium and vitamin D in your diet. These nutrients are important for healthy baby teeth. Calcium rich foods include milk, cheese, yogurt, and almonds. Salmon, milk, egg yolks and margarine are good sources of vitamin D.

How do I care for my baby's teeth?

Start oral care before teeth appear. Use a clean, soft cloth or gauze to wipe your baby's gums and mouth twice a day beginning at birth.

Once the first tooth appears, use a soft baby toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste to brush twice a day. You only need a *tiny* dab of toothpaste. Find a comfortable position. It is often easiest to brush your baby's teeth when they are lying down. Brushing before bed is especially important.

Lift your baby's lip regularly to check for white or brown spots on their teeth. Look closely along the gum line. Call your dentist if you notice anything unusual.

Can I give my baby a bottle at bedtime?

Do not put your child to sleep with a bottle of anything but water. Milk, juice, formula and many other beverages contain sugar, which can cause serious tooth decay when left in your baby's mouth while they sleep. Save those drinks for meals and snacks.

If your child needs help breaking the habit of going to sleep with a bottle, gradually dilute its contents with water.

Parents often use bottles and sippy cups to sooth their babies during the day. Instead, try holding, rocking, reading, singing or rubbing their back.

When should my baby first see a dentist?

Take your baby to see a dentist once their first tooth comes in, or by their first birthday. If you notice white or brown spots on their teeth, call your dentist right away.

At your baby's first visit, the dentist and their staff will give you tips on cleaning your child's teeth. If there are any problems, your dentist can catch them early.

When should I stop giving my baby a bottle?

Bottles are often used as soothers rather than for feeding. To help prevent tooth decay, switch from the bottle to a cup once your child is old enough to sit up for meals and snacks. Give juice from a cup.

Offer water between meals and snacks.