

- how to tell when your baby is teething

Some babies when they are teething experience an increase in drooling. They may be irritable and hard to comfort. Some children may experience a very low-grade fever. Common signs associated with teething is an increase of putting their fingers in their own mouth, wanting to chew on their parents fingers, chewing on blankets, chewing on just about everything.

* how to help baby deal with the discomfort (and advice on products like teethers; meds; homeopathic remedies; etc.)

Many babies while teething like to chew on cold things. I recommend that the parent/caregiver dampen a washcloth and then freeze it. Babies love to chew on the cold, crunchy cloth. Teething rings are also helpful. The cold can ease some of the discomfort and the chewing helps massage their gums to help the tooth finish breaking through the gum. Over the counter child pain relievers can be helpful at times. The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry does not recommend the use of any topical product on the gum, as they are associated with some toxicity for the child.

* common questions/issues from parents about teething (ex. what teeth will grow in first? Second?; why baby has more/less teeth than others in his age group)

These are definitely questions that I get asked a lot. Most children get their two lower front teeth first. These can be followed by the two lower side front teeth or the two upper front teeth. The eruption pattern for baby teeth can be in any order. Many baby books list the most common sequences but I have seen many variables on this pattern. Almost all children will have the full complement of 20 teeth by the age of three.

In addition, there is a range on age when babies may begin to teethe. I have seen babies as young as 3-4 months have teeth erupting and I have seen the first tooth come in as late as 18 months. It really does not mean anything as far as when the teeth come in. The important thing is to visit the pediatric dentist when the first tooth erupts and no later than one year of age. This establishes a “Dental Home” for the child where the parents/caregivers will receive advice and guidance on the oral health of their child in addition to the availability of their pediatric dentist in case of any trauma. The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, the American Dental Association as well as the American Academy of Pediatrics all recommend this by age one dental visit for children. It is well known that prevention works in helping prevent dental decay in children. Pediatric dentists will coach the family in ways to keep their child cavity free with optimum oral health. This initial visit is very similar to a well baby visit with their pediatrician or family practitioner. An exam will be done and then information on prevention will be given to the parents/caregivers to aid them in keeping their child in optimum oral health.

* Precautions parents should take (ex. Washing hands frequently if baby chews on them, avoid wearing long necklaces with small parts that baby can swallow, etc.)

Parents/caregivers need to keep all items that their baby chews on as clean as possible. Parents/caregivers should not place a child's teething ring, pacifier, eating utensil or any other item in their mouth to clean it for their baby if dropped. Bacteria in their mouth can be transferred to their baby. Babies are not born with decay causing bacteria in their mouth. This is transmitted from their parents/caregivers so parents need to be very aware of this. Keeping their own mouth in excellent health will decrease the likelihood of this transmission.

Parents/caregivers should always be aware of small items that present a choking hazard for their baby. Necklaces that may be broken with multiple small pieces that may get hidden on the floor are an excellent example. Babies when crawling see small items that a standing adult may not notice. Parents should be ever vigilant with a crawling baby in the family.

* advice on caring for new teeth

The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry recommend that parents begin wiping their child's gums after each feeding even before any teeth are present in the mouth. As soon as a tooth erupts parents/caregivers should begin using a soft bristled toothbrush after meals. Please use no more than a thin smear of fluoridated toothpaste until age two. After that, you can use a small pea sized amount of fluoridated toothpaste when brushing. When a baby has two teeth that touch each other the parent should begin to floss.

Establishing a "Dental Home" for the child by the first birthday can greatly increase the chances of the child staying cavity free with optimum oral health for their lifetime. Early habits instill a lifetime of excellent oral health care.

Parents should also try to childproof their home with a focus on preventing mouth trauma. Having rounded edges on furniture and cabinets, non-slip rugs, proper car seats, etc. can all help to prevent trauma to their child's mouth. If trauma does occur, your pediatric dentist is available to see the child and evaluate the injury and recommend appropriate treatment. This is another example of the importance of establishing a "Dental Home" early for their child.

* advice on what to look for in a pediatric dentist

Many parents ask for a referral from their pediatrician or family practitioner. Others ask their friends and family members. Pediatric Dentists are often known as the "pediatricians of the mouth". They are general dentists who have taken an additional 2-3 years of training on children's unique oral health needs such as child psychology, growth and development, and special health care needs. We treat children from infancy through adolescence, with each group needing different approaches. The pediatric dentist is best qualified to address all their needs. Pediatric Dentists have chosen this profession because they love children. Their staffs also love to work with children. Parents may want to take an office tour of an office they are thinking about, meet the dentist, and see if the personality of the office fits their needs.

Parents may also inquire about insurance plans they accept and office policies prior to setting up the initial appointment. All pediatric dentists are there to help

them and their child have the best visit possible. Having this initial visit by age one will allow the child to get to know the office, be comfortable before any trauma has occurred. Having the first dental visit for a child when an injury has occurred is very difficult. The child may be in pain and is frightened. Not the best scenario for an easy, comfortable visit although even in a trauma situation, pediatric dentists are well trained to keep the child and parent as comfortable and at ease as possible. Parents need to choose the office where they feel that their questions are answered, they have input into treatment decisions and their child is happy and comfortable.