

When Your Child is Teething

Teething is a process that can be difficult for parents as well as for their babies. It can seem to change a normally happy and easygoing baby into a chewing and crying machine.

Thankfully, there are actions parents can take to help their babies during this developmental milestone. Read more to learn about the teething process and what you can do to help your baby.

The Teething Process

Babies are born with a fully- or partially-developed set of 20 teeth, called primary teeth. In some cases, one or two of these teeth will be visible at birth, but more often, the teeth remain in the jawbone.

Teething usually begins around 6 months of age, although it can begin earlier or later, depending on the child. In general, teeth will push through the gums in pairs, with the bottom middle teeth appearing first. Teething is usually complete by the time the child reaches 2 1/2 years.

The age of your child at the onset of teething is thought to be somewhat due to heredity, not to mental development.

By the time your child reaches 6 or 7 years of age, the primary teeth will begin to be replaced by a new set of teeth, called secondary teeth. This set contains 32 teeth that will again emerge in pairs. This process may take several years to complete.

Signs of Teething

While there are no universal signs that signal the beginning of the teething process, the following signs may be associated with teething:

- Irritability and restlessness
- Increased drooling
- Slight fever
- Sore, tender and swollen gums
- Change in sleeping or eating patterns
- Chewing on fingers and toys
- Crying

Although teething can cause a baby's temperature to rise slightly, a high fever is not typically a sign of teething, nor is a rash or diarrhea. If your baby has any of these symptoms, contact their pediatrician immediately.

Helping Your Child

Some babies go through the teething process with ease, while others will experience high levels of discomfort. Use the following tips if your baby is experiencing discomfort from teething:

- Keep a cloth or soft washrag handy to wipe away drool. Extra drool can irritate the skin on your baby's chin.
- Gently rub your baby's gums with a clean finger or a clean, wet washcloth to ease tenderness.
- Give your baby a teething ring to chew on. Placing the teething ring in the refrigerator for a few minutes can also help to alleviate discomfort; do not place teething rings in the freezer, since they can become too hard.
- Do not use teething rings that are filled with liquid, since they can break open. Firm rubber rings are best.
- If your baby is experiencing a lot of discomfort, talk to your pediatrician to see if he or she can recommend any medications that may soothe your baby's pain.

Caring for Baby's Teeth

It is never too early to begin establishing good oral hygiene habits with your child. Use the following guidelines to keep your baby's teeth healthy from the start:

- Gently clean the teeth with your finger or a damp washrag.
- Do not use toothpaste until your child is old enough to spit it out without swallowing the toothpaste (around 2 years). Use a children's toothpaste, and be careful not to use too much.
- Do not let your baby fall asleep while drinking from a bottle, since this can rot baby teeth.
- Start taking your child to the dentist for regular checkups once they are 1. Many dentists have special chairs and toys to make children more comfortable.

Resources

- American Dental Association: www.mouthhealthy.org
- National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research: www.nidcr.nih.gov/

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