



# Oral Care for Infants and Young Children

Baby teeth generally appear between the ages of 6 months and 2½ years. These primary teeth are important. They help your child to chew food properly and develop healthy speech patterns, and they hold a place for the permanent teeth to follow.

Cavities in baby teeth can lead to pain and infection and can negatively affect your child's growth and development. To help prevent cavities, start good oral care routines early.

- Clean your infant's mouth with a soft cloth after every feeding.
- Avoid passing cavity-causing germs to your child, which can happen when you lick your child's pacifier or share eating utensils.
- Do not let your child fall asleep with a bottle containing anything other than water.
- Once your child's first tooth appears, use a soft toothbrush with a small amount of fluoride toothpaste (the size of a grain of rice) to clean the tooth and gums.
- Offer a clean teething ring or cold, wet cloth to relieve your child's tender gums as teeth erupt.
- Use floss to clean between all teeth that are touching.
- Begin regular dental hygiene visits by age one.

## The First Dental Visit By Age 1

At the first visit, the dental hygienist will check your child's mouth, answer any questions you have, and provide advice for caring for your child's teeth at home. As your child gets older, additional dental hygiene services may be recommended, including:

- Sealants: a plastic coating that adheres to the deep pits and grooves on children's teeth to make the surfaces of the teeth smooth and easier to clean. Sealants help to protect these teeth from decay.
- Professional fluoride applications: a service that provides additional protection against cavities.

## Other Ways to Help

- Offer healthy foods and snacks, and water or unsweetened drinks. Consult *Canada's Food Guide* for more information.
- Establish calming routines for your child. Rocking and singing are good alternatives to prolonged thumbsucking or pacifier use, which can affect the development of the jaw.
- Check your child's mouth and teeth for changes regularly. If something looks unusual, schedule an appointment with your dental hygienist.
- Continue to help your children with their oral care routine until age 8 or for as long as supervision is needed.



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