

Pampers Baby Series...



My Little Toothsome



Teething means big things are to come for your baby because before long, your baby can start on solids and may even give you a little nibble sometimes.

When your child starts to teethe, you may notice the following: gum rubbing; sucking; irritability; and decreased appetite. Parents tend to attribute fever or ear pulling to painful teething. If your baby starts to pull her ear, you should bring him or her to the doctor.

Never attribute any symptom without having your child's doctor make a diagnosis.

"Teething is a normal part of development when new teeth are cutting through the surface of the gums. Teething has been wrongly blamed for causing fever or diarrhoea. In actual fact, for most children, the result of teething is just teeth!" Says Dr Toh Siew Luan, a registrar with the Pedodontic Unit, Department of Restorative Dentistry, at National Dental Centre.

Teething Timeline

Baby's teeth do not always appear in a fixed order, though usually, the first teeth to appear are usually the front teeth, also known as the

First steps, firsts words, a growing baby has so many firsts. And probably the first of these firsts are first teeth. Painful yet significant, the discomfort can transform your gentle bundle of joy into a gnawing-happy baby. By YM Lai.

central incisors. First, the child's upper central incisors push through the gum line followed by the lower teeth. Then, a month later, the two teeth flanking the lower front teeth or lower lateral incisors appear. The next to appear are the first molars (back teeth for grinding food) and finally the eyeteeth, or the pointy teeth in the upper jaw. By the third birthday, most children will have all 20 teeth.

Parents should not worry if the teeth do not come out on time. Usually it is of little significance. On average, it takes about eight weeks when teething begins and teeth emerge. Most

babies have eight teeth by their first birthday.

Pain Relief

Teething babies often find relief by chewing, leaving bite marks on crib railings, board books, and even you. Dr Toh suggests letting your child bite on a clean, chilled teething ring or a cool plastic spoon and cold wet washcloth or rubbing the baby's gum with a clean finger, as the pressure seems to relieve discomfort from teething.

What about teething gels or pacifiers or teething that very often get a lot of flak? "Teething gels can reduce the pain from sore gums when used correctly as instructed by the dentist. These gels are actually anaesthetic gels that are absorbed onto the gums. However, the effect is short-lived and your child may object to the swollen and numbing sensation. Avoid gels containing sugar as you do not want the teeth to erupt in a sugary environment which may in turn promote tooth decay," shares Dr Toh.

As for pacifiers, Dr Boey Sean Kuan, Dentist, Pacific Healthcare Specialist Centre, shares that most children suck on their



thumbs or pacifiers at some point and it's harmless as long as this habit does not persist past four to five years of age. However, should these habits persist, it would upset the pressure balance in the oral cavity, interfere with the alignment of teeth and jaw size which may require orthodontic intervention.

Feeding the Teething

With teeth, your baby starts to practice chewing when he can get his hands on any toy and even chewing on his own hand. You can feed your baby foods such as peeled chopped apples or scrubbed raw carrots to chew well before six months old. Doing so allows baby to get used to solids in case he becomes too used to semi-liquid foods and may gag at solids. Chewing is good for babies' developing jaw, and letting them feed themselves helps them feel enthusiastic and independent about eating.

Quick Dental Habits

Although first teeth fall out naturally, it is imperative to take care of them still. Many parents think baby teeth aren't important because they're eventually replaced by permanent ones.

Dr Toh confirms, "Baby teeth are important for chewing, appearance and speaking. They hold spaces in the jaws required for the adult teeth to come into good position. Bad baby teeth can affect the child's general health as children with untreated dental decay can suffer years of chronic pain. In some cases dental decay can lead to dental infection of the

gums and jaws presenting with acute pain, fever and swelling."

A rinse of water. Most infant foods easily wash off baby's teeth with just a drink of water after meals. Despite this, brushing with a soft toothbrush is still imperative, so baby can get used to having it in his mouth. Gently clean your child's teeth with a toothbrush or thimble-like cleaner and some bicarbonate of soda if your toddler has eaten sticky, sugary foods.

Toothbrush and toothpaste matters. Recommends Dr Toh, "A soft-bristled toothbrush with a small head can be used for cleaning a baby's teeth at least once a day at bedtime. Alternatively, a clean washcloth or a gauze pad can be used to wipe and remove liquid and food debris from the teeth and gums. Brush babies' teeth with water only." For babies aged two, use a pea-size amount of non-fluoride toothpaste and for children up to six years old, children's toothpaste can be used. Each time a pea-size would be adequate. Says Dr Toh, "Toothpaste containing fluoride can be used for young children around age two to three when they are able to spit out and not swallow excess toothpaste after brushing."

Watch for cavities. The first signs of cavities in baby teeth are discoloration and minor pitting. Watch out for a disease

commonly called baby-bottle mouth, which can lead to the loss of primary teeth. This usually develops in babies who are routinely put to bed with bottles of juice or milk. Dr Boey Sean Kuan, a dentist at the Pacific Healthcare Specialist Centre says, "Snacking or allowing children to carry a bottle of milk or juice to sleep should be avoided. This would mean that the teeth are constantly being "bathed" with sugary and acidic fluids and increase the risk of decay or "bottle caries."

Baby's first dental visit. Your baby should have his first dental check-up by age one, just to make sure his teeth are coming in properly. "A child should see a paediatric dentist within six months of eruption of the first tooth and no later than his/her first birthday. Early dental visits give the dentist an opportunity to examine the child's mouth and provide advice on prevention of oral diseases. It also gives the parents the chance to discuss topics on feeding practices, mouth habits and teething."

Also, Dr Boey adds, "Parents should ideally bring the child even when they are having their regular check-ups so that the dental setting will not be too foreign to the child. If the child is particularly nervous, they should see a paedodontist who specialises in dentistry for children." ■