

## **COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THOSE IMPORTANT BABY TEETH**

### **WHY ARE BABY TEETH SO IMPORTANT? AREN'T THEY JUST GOING TO FALL OUT ANYWAY?**

Baby teeth are important for a number of reasons. They are vital in helping your child to eat and to speak properly. Although the first baby teeth are usually lost about six years of age, others won't fall out until your child is twelve years old! That is a lot of chewing. Your child needs them for smiling! It is important for a child to develop a good self-image. You would not want your little one to be embarrassed about their appearance! Baby teeth act as "space maintainers" so that the grown-up teeth will come in straight. If a baby tooth is lost too early then the adult tooth replacing it may not be guided into the proper position and may cause adult teeth to come in crooked. Finally, if baby teeth are allowed to rot and abscess, it can affect the grown-up teeth trying to develop in the jaw. Baby teeth are good primers for teaching your child good oral care habits. Baby teeth are very important and are worth caring for!

### **WHEN CAN I EXPECT MY BABY'S TEETH TO START COMING IN?**

Most babies start teething at about six months of age... although some babies are born with teeth and others don't start teething until almost one year of age. It is all considered to be well within normal limits. Most children have all their baby teeth by the time they reach two and a half years of age.... Although again, some children are done sooner and others later. As long as the teeth are present in the jaws and are showing signs of developing, there is no need to worry.

## **HOW MANY BABY TEETH SHOULD THERE BE?**

When your child is finished teething at about two and a half years of age, there should be 20 baby teeth; ten in the upper jaw and ten in the lower jaw. These 20 primary teeth will be followed by 32 permanent teeth that will eventually replace them. Your child should have all of the primary teeth until age five or six when they begin to loosen and fall out. This process usually lasts until the child is 12 or 13. The primary teeth fall out because permanent teeth are pushing them and by about age 14, children should have a full set of 28 permanent teeth. Four additional molars called wisdom teeth may grow in behind the permanent teeth in late adolescence for a total of 32 teeth.

## **WHAT CAN RELIEVE THE DISCOMFORT OF TEETHING FOR MY CHILD?**

Between the ages of six months and three years, your child may experience sore gums and general oral discomfort as primary teeth erupt. Signs that tooth eruption is causing discomfort in your child include crankiness, lack of appetite, excessive drooling, fever, restless behaviour, pink or red cheeks, coughing, upset stomach and chewing or sucking of fingers and toys. A cold, wet cloth for your baby to suck on can soothe gums. There are also teething accessories and toys that can be chilled for your child to chew on to relieve discomfort.

## **WHEN SHOULD I START CLEANING MY BABY'S TEETH SO THAT I CAN MAKE SURE MY BABY WON'T GET CAVITIES?**

You should start cleaning your baby's GUMS even before he/she starts teething! Simply use a clean wet face cloth or gauze and wipe baby's gums at bedtime. When the first few teeth are in you can still use a washcloth or switch to a very soft babies' toothbrush. It is of utmost importance to clean your child's teeth JUST BEFORE they go to bed. Bacteria cause most of the damage to our teeth while we sleep! Also, your child should NEVER be put to bed with a bottle containing anything but water! If you put your child to sleep with a milk or juice bottle, their teeth can COME IN ROTTEN! Even drinks that are good for your child contain different types of sugar that can be harmful to baby teeth. When allowed to pool during sleep, sugary or carbohydrate – rich liquids can lead to cavities, tooth loss, infections or more serious problems. Watch for dull white spots or lines on the teeth, particularly on the tongue side. Dark or discoloured teeth may be a sign of a more serious problem.

## **HOW DO I CLEAN MY CHILD'S TEETH?**

For children under three years of age, you should brush their teeth with a child-sized toothbrush and plain water. For children over three years of age, you can start to use a pea-sized amount of toothpaste but you should ensure that your child can spit out the toothpaste rather than swallow most of it.

## **WHEN SHOULD MY CHILD START SEEING THE DENTIST?**

Your child's first real dental check-up should be about two and a half years of age, when all twenty baby teeth have come in. However, we feel that you should be bringing your child along for your cleanings to watch. We want them to get used to the dental office and feel comfortable with the people there. A child should be introduced to the dentist before a problem develops so that positive feelings can develop with the dentist.

## **SHOULD BABY TEETH BE FLOSSED?**

Yes! Flossing is important for baby because it enables you to clean between the teeth where the toothbrush cannot reach and where most cavities start. Usually, you will have to floss for them until they are eight or nine years old.

## **WHEN SHOULD I START WORRYING ABOUT MY CHILD'S THUMB SUCKING HABITS?**

Thumb sucking is an extremely innate behavior. Your baby was already thumb sucking while still in the womb. As such it can be difficult to break the habit. Fortunately, there is no need to worry until the permanent teeth begin to erupt. Most children, by the time they are four years old, only thumb suck at bedtime and stop immediately after they fall asleep. If a child is older and is still thumb sucking, we have some simple techniques to help them quit the habit. If a child is having difficulty quitting, you may want to set up a rewards program for each day that they do not suck their thumb. Praise is always a good reward. The dentist can place an appliance in your child's mouth that should end the thumb sucking within days if other methods have been tried without success.

## **IS IT “OK” TO GIVE MY BABY A SOOTHER?**

It certainly is! As mentioned earlier, sucking is an innate behavior and is satisfying and calming. By the time your child is approximately two years old, they will probably just be using their soother to fall asleep. It will be simple for you to put the soother away one day and tell your child that it is gone. Prolonged and vigorous sucking after the age of five can cause problems with dental development. If you have concerns, talk with your dentist.

## **SHOULD LOOSE PRIMARY TEETH BE PULLED?**

Losing primary teeth before they are ready to fall out can affect the proper positioning of the permanent teeth. If a baby tooth is lost too early, other teeth may tip or fill in the vacant space and force the permanent teeth to come in crooked. If the permanent tooth has started erupting and is approximately half visible then the wiggly baby tooth in front of it should be removed to allow the permanent tooth to erupt into the proper position.

## **HOW OFTEN SHOULD MY CHILD SEE A DENTIST?**

Visit the dentist every six months to check for cavities and proper tooth development. This way your child can be happy and relaxed rather than frightened and in discomfort. You can discuss any dental care issues you may have at these appointments.

Remember that, as a parent, you have a vital role to play as teacher and motivator. With your support your child can develop excellent oral health habits that will last a lifetime!

**If you have any further questions please feel free to contact us  
at 905-508-2244.**