

Frequently Asked Questions

From refusing to brush to chipped teeth - there are many issues parents face when trying to keep their children's teeth healthy.

Q. My toddler doesn't understand when I tell her to spit out toothpaste and she swallows it. Should I still use toothpaste to brush my child's teeth?

A. If your child isn't able to spit out after brushing, continue using a smear of low fluoride toothpaste and wipe her mouth with a washer or tissue. It's really important to keep brushing her teeth and there is variability in the age at which children learn to spit out.

Q. My child has just turned one but only has four teeth. Isn't taking her to the dentist now a waste of time and money? Is it ok to wait till she has more teeth?

A. A visit to your dentist at this stage of your baby's dental development is mostly for you to gain individual advice which will help your child to avoid dental decay.

Your baby's first teeth (known as primary teeth) are just as important as their permanent teeth. They help your child to learn to chew, speak properly and most importantly, these teeth reserve the space in your child's gums for the eruption of their permanent teeth.

As soon as your baby develops their first tooth, they are at risk of dental decay, which is known as Early Childhood Caries (ECC). Your child's first visit to the dentist should take place 6 months from the time their first tooth appears or by their first birthday.

Q. Brushing my toddler's teeth is a battle. He won't open his mouth and I can only brush his teeth for a few seconds. Should I just stop and wait till he gets a bit older?

A. It's important to establish good oral hygiene early, so if your toddler resists teeth cleaning or struggles to sit still for more than a few seconds, try these suggestions:


- Tooth brushing for your baby can be done more easily with them lying on a bed or change table. The time taken to brush can be increased slowly until the baby is able to tolerate a two minute brushing as a toddler
- Sing nursery rhymes or play a favourite song while you help your child brush their teeth
- Offer a reward such as a sticker every time your toddler allows you to brush for two minutes
- Consider an age appropriate battery-powered tooth brush, which adds novelty to cleaning their teeth
- Encourage your child to practise teeth cleaning (under your supervision) to instil good oral hygiene habits from an early age. Some toddlers like to be independent so it is a good idea for them to use one toothbrush while you use another one and take turns at brushing
- Make brushing as much fun as you can to avoid any negative association or resistance. Be sure to talk to your dentist if you need more advice

Q. Flossing my 2 ½ year olds teeth is almost impossible to do. She won't open her mouth and cries when I try. Can you give me some tips on how to get her to let me floss?

A. When your child is about two and a half years old, you can start to introduce them to flossing their teeth to help remove decay-causing bacteria from between their teeth.

It will take time for your child to get used to having their teeth flossed. Ideally, their teeth should be flossed twice a week particularly in areas where the teeth are touching. Here are some tips that might help:

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For more information on caring for your teeth visit the ADA's website: www.ada.org.au

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Slide the floss between your child's teeth and gently work it up and down, against the surfaces of each tooth. Do not snap the floss down between the teeth as the floss may damage their gums. After flossing, have your child rinse with water, then brush (or if you prefer, brush then floss) your child's teeth

If you find flossing your child's teeth difficult, ask your dentist to show you how to do it. Floss holders are available, which can make flossing easier for some children

Q. How do I know when my daughter is teething, and what should I do when this happens?

A. The appearance of your baby's first teeth (known as primary teeth) is commonly called 'teething'. Many babies experience some discomfort during this time. Most babies are irritable when new teeth break through their gums. To help relieve the discomfort you can:

- Wash your hands and gently rub your baby's gums with a clean finger
- Give your baby a teething ring or wet washcloth to bite. Teething rings can be chilled in the refrigerator before being used to help manage gum swelling and pain. (Do not put teething rings in the freezer)
- Give your baby non-sweetened rusks to chew on

Signs and symptoms may appear and disappear over several days. Ask your dentist or pharmacist for advice before using any pain relief specifically created for babies and toddlers. Never give aspirin to a baby or young child.

Q. What should I do if my child chips or knocks out a tooth?

A. When babies are learning to walk they are prone to falls and injuries to their mouth and teeth. Knowing how to administer first aid in case of a dental injury is important. Your child's primary teeth are just as important as their permanent teeth.

If your child knocks out a primary tooth you should not attempt to put the tooth back in its socket because it may cause damage to the permanent tooth or lead to infection.

It is important to seek urgent dental treatment for your child to check if any pieces of tooth remain in the socket and to ensure no other damage has been done.

To manage bleeding, apply pressure directly to the injured area with a clean cloth or gauze pack. This will help to control the bleeding. To minimise swelling, you can apply ice or cold compresses to your child's face at the site of the injury. If the injury is severe it may require stitches. Your child may require some age appropriate pain-relieving medication.

With any dental injury, it's important to always seek professional advice from a dentist, or if a dentist is not available, seek advice from a healthcare professional.