



Oral Health Education

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## HOW DO I CARE FOR MY INFANT'S TEETH?

### **How Do I Care for My Baby's Teeth?**

Good oral care starts from the beginning of your child's life. Even before his or her first teeth emerge, certain factors can affect their future appearance and health. For instance, tetracycline, a common antibiotic, can cause tooth discoloration. For this reason, they should not be used by nursing mothers or by expectant mothers in the last half of pregnancy.

Since baby teeth usually emerge around six months of age, standard oral health procedures like brushing and flossing aren't required for infants. However, infants have special oral health needs that every new parent should know about. These include guarding against baby bottle decay and making sure your child is receiving enough fluoride.

### **What Is Baby Bottle Decay and How Can I Prevent it?**

Baby bottle decay is caused by frequent exposure, over time, to liquids containing sugars. These include milk, formula, and fruit juices. The sugary liquids pool around the teeth for long periods of time as your baby sleeps, leading to cavities that first develop in the upper and lower front teeth. For this reason, you shouldn't let your baby fall asleep with a bottle of juice or milk in his mouth. Instead, at naptime, give your child a bottle filled with water or a pacifier recommended by your dentist. If you breast-feed, avoid letting the baby nurse continuously. And after each feeding, wipe your baby's teeth and gums with a clean, damp washcloth or a gauze pad.

### **What Is Fluoride and How Do I Know if My Baby is Getting the Right Amount?**

Fluoride is beneficial even before your child's teeth begin to erupt. It strengthens the tooth enamel as the teeth are forming. In many municipal water supplies, the right amount of fluoride is added for proper tooth development. To find out whether your water contains fluoride, and how much, call your local water district. If your water supply does not contain any (or enough) fluoride, talk to your pediatrician or dentist about fluoride drops that can be given to your baby daily. If you use bottled water for drinking and cooking, be sure to tell your doctor or dentist. They may prescribe fluoride supplements for the baby.

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