

Mouth care for toddlers and preschoolers (12 months to 5 years)

Step 1: Keep your child's mouth and teeth clean

When the first tooth comes in and up until your child is two

- **Twice a day**—every morning and before going to bed—let baby sit and chew on a soft-bristled tooth brush with a small smear of fluoride toothpaste.
- **When the baby's done, brush baby's teeth.** Don't use more toothpaste. When you brush, lay your baby in a safe position. You need to be able to support your baby's head and to see baby's teeth clearly. Your hands should be clean and free to open baby's mouth and do the brushing.
- **Check for signs of tooth decay.** When you brush your child's teeth, lift up the lips and look at the front and back teeth. If you notice brown or white spots on your child's teeth, call a dentist right away. This may be the first sign of decay.

Ages two to six

- Help your child brush every morning and before going to bed. After your child brushes, you take a turn to be sure all the teeth are clean.
- Use a soft-bristled toothbrush and a tiny, pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste.
- Teach your child to spit out the toothpaste.
- Floss your child's teeth once a day. Check with a member of the dental team if you have questions about how to floss your child's teeth. Most children will need help flossing until they are about 8 to 10 years old.

Caution: keep toothpaste out of children's reach.

Three Steps to help prevent cavities



When are children able to brush on their own?

When children can tie their shoes or colour between the lines, they will usually be able to brush on their own. Until you're sure that they are doing it right every time, you'll still need to watch them while they brush. Check afterwards to be sure they've done a good job.

What causes cavities?

Sugar in food and drinks plus plaque in the mouth can lead to tooth decay. Plaque is a thin, hard-to-see layer of germs that covers the teeth and gums.

These germs use the sugars in food and drink to make acid. This acid eats away the hard outer layer of the teeth—called enamel—and causes tooth decay.

The longer food and sugary drinks stay on the teeth, the greater the risk of tooth decay.

Dried fruits, raisins and 100% fruit leathers are healthy foods but they stick to the teeth. These foods are best eaten with meals. Brush your child's teeth afterwards.

Step 2: Don't let food stay on your child's teeth

- **Never put your baby or toddler to bed with a bottle.** Juice (even 100% unsweetened juice), milk, formula, and breast milk all contain sugar. They can cause tooth decay when left on the teeth too long.
- **Never allow your child to sip all day on drinks other than water.** If children sip all day on any drink that contains sugar—including milk and 100% unsweetened juice—it increases the risk of tooth decay. Offer your child milk or 100% juice at mealtime. Offer plain, unsweetened, unflavoured WATER to drink between meals.
- **Have your child sit in a highchair or at a small table for snacks and drinks.** Encourage your child to finish food and drinks at one sitting. Dried fruits, raisins and 100% fruit leathers are healthy foods but they stick to the teeth. These foods are best eaten with meals. Brush your child's teeth afterwards.

Choose healthy snacks

Healthy snacks have foods from at least 2 of the 4 food groups from *Canada's Food Guide*. The 4 food groups are: vegetables and fruit; grain products; milk and alternatives; and meat and alternatives.

Some healthy snacks are:

- Fresh fruits and vegetables—choose vegetables and fruit more often than juice
- Whole grain foods—like whole wheat toast
- Milk and Alternatives—such as plain yogurt or hard cheese (like cheddar)
- Meats and Alternatives—such as eggs, tofu or pieces of lentil burgers

Offer plain, unsweetened, unflavoured WATER to drink between meals.

LIMIT sweet, sticky or salty snacks and drinks, such as: cakes and pastries; chocolate and candy; cookies and granola bars; donuts and muffins; ice cream and frozen desserts (like popsicles); potato chips, nachos and other salty snacks; fruit flavoured drinks; soft drinks; sports and energy drinks; sweetened hot or cold drinks.

Step 3: Have regular visits to the dentist

Take your child to the dentist:

- **By the first birthday.** The dental team will check your child's risk for cavities and answer your questions.
- **If you find brown or white spots on your child's teeth.** These may be the first signs of tooth decay.
- **If your child injures a tooth.**

Concerned about the cost of dental care?

MSI covers basic dental care for children from birth up to the end of the month in which they turn 10.

For children covered by a co-pay dental plan: MSI will pay the portion that you would normally pay for these basic dental services and treatments.

To find out more about the MSI Children's Oral Health Program, talk to your dentist or call:

Toll free: 1-888-846-9199.

In HRM: 832-3253.

Teething

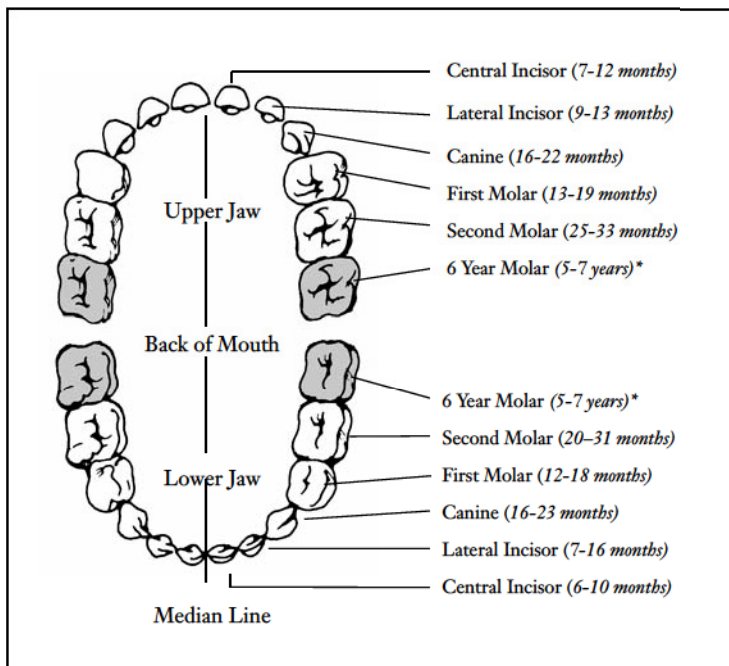
Teething is a natural process in which your child's teeth push through the gums. Most children have a full set of baby teeth by the time they are about 2 1/2-3 years old.

Fever or diarrhea is not a normal part of teething. If your child has a fever or diarrhea for more than 24 hours, call your doctor.

Teething can make your child restless and cranky. To help them feel better:

- **Give your child a clean, cold facecloth to suck or chew.**
- **Give your child a teething ring.** Teething rings should be cold but not frozen. Wash them often. Use warm, soapy water and rinse well before giving them to your child.
- **Massage your child's gums using a clean finger.**

*Teething,
thumbsucking
and soothers*



- **Check with your dentist, doctor or pharmacist if you think your toddler might need medicine for teething pain.** Ask which kind to use and how much is best for your toddler.
- **DON'T use teething biscuits.** Teething biscuits are high in sugar and may cause cavities.
- **DON'T use teething gels.** They can affect your child's health or cause choking by making the throat numb. If your child continues to be restless or cranky, check with your dentist or family doctor.

Thumb sucking and soothers

Thumb sucking and using soothers will probably not hurt your child's teeth as long as it stops by the time the permanent teeth start to come in (about age 5).

To learn more about taking care of your child's teeth:

- Contact your Public Health Services office
- Call your dentist
- Visit one of these web pages:
 - www.cda-adc.ca
 - www.gov.ns.ca/hpp

Public Health Services



www.gov.ns.ca/hpp