A Healthy Mouth for Your Baby

"The Grandfathers and the Grandmothers are in the children; teach them well."
  – Ojibwe

A Healthy Mouth for Your Baby

Healthy teeth are important—even baby teeth. Children need healthy teeth to help them chew and to speak clearly. And baby teeth hold space for adult teeth. This booklet can help you keep your baby's mouth healthy and give him a healthy start!

1. **Protect your baby's teeth with fluoride.**
2. **Check and clean your baby's teeth.**
3. **Feed your baby healthy food.**
4. **Don't put your baby to bed with a bottle.**
5. **Take your child to the dentist by age 1.**

"When do you have to start taking care of a baby's teeth?"

Hope and her sister Mary were watching Mary's children play. "What are you doing?" asked Hope.

"I'm cleaning my baby's teeth," said Mary.

"But your baby hardly has any teeth!" said Hope.

"Yes, but the dentist said there are things I can do to keep my baby from getting cavities," said Mary.

"But don't baby teeth just fall out?" asked Hope.

"Yes, but before they fall out baby teeth can decay and cause pain for the baby. And baby teeth are important—they hold space for adult teeth," said Mary.
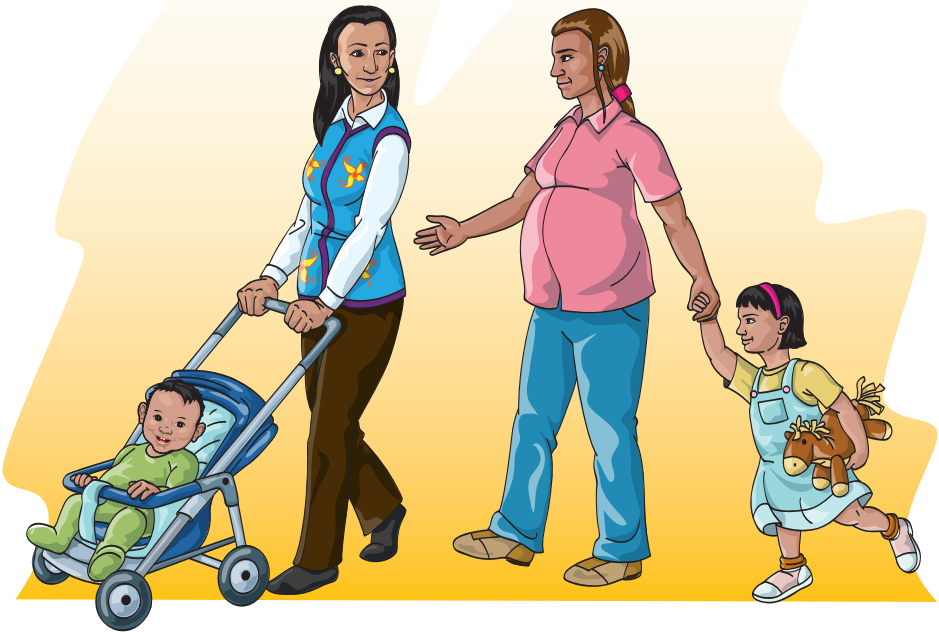
"What else did the dentist say?" asked Hope.

"She told me that fluoride protects teeth. She also said to feed my baby healthy foods and not to put my baby to bed with a bottle," said Mary.

"When do you have to start taking care of a baby's teeth?" asked Hope.

"As soon as they come in. Teeth can start to decay as soon as they appear in the mouth," said Mary.

"I'll have to start thinking of those things soon!" said Hope.

1 | Protect your Baby's Teeth with Fluoride

Fluoride (said like floor-eyed) protects teeth from tooth decay. It can even heal early decay.

Fluoride is in the drinking water of many communities.

Ask a health care provider if your water has fluoride in it. If it doesn't, ask about other kinds of fluoride (such as fluoride varnish or drops) that can help keep your baby's teeth healthy.

2 | Check and Clean Your Baby's Teeth

Check your baby's teeth

Healthy teeth should be all one color. If you see spots or stains on the teeth, take your baby to a dentist.

Clean your baby's teeth

Clean them as soon as they come in with a clean, soft cloth or a baby's toothbrush. Clean the teeth at least once a day. It's best to clean them right before bedtime.

At about age 2 (or sooner if a health care provider suggests it) you should start putting fluoride toothpaste on your child's toothbrush. Use only a tiny bit of toothpaste, no bigger than a grain of rice.

3 | Feed Your Baby Healthy Food

- Choose foods without a lot of sugar in them.
- Give your child fruits and vegetables for snacks.
- Save cookies and other treats for special occasions.

4 | Don't Put Your Baby to Bed with a Bottle

Milk, formula, juice, and other drinks such as soda all have sugar in them. If sugary liquids stay on your baby's teeth too long, it can lead to tooth decay. (And decayed teeth can cause pain for your baby.)

What's one of the most important things you can do to keep your baby from getting cavities?

Avoid putting him to bed with a bottle--at night or at nap time. (If you do put your baby to bed with a bottle, fill it only with water.)

Here are some other things you can do:

- Between feedings, don't give your baby a bottle or sippy cup filled with sweet drinks to carry around.
- Near his first birthday, teach your child to drink from an open cup.
- If your baby uses a pacifier, don't dip it in anything sweet like sugar or honey.

5 | Take Your Child to the Dentist

Your child should have a dental visit by his first birthday. At this visit, the dentist will:

- Check your child's teeth.
- Show you the best way to clean your child's teeth.
- Talk to you about other things such as a healthy diet and fluoride that can keep your child's mouth healthy.

The following oral health care resources are available in your community:

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For more copies contact:

National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research

National Oral Health
Information Center
1 NOHIC Way
Bethesda, MD 20892-3500
1-866-232-4528
www.nidcr.nih.gov

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