

# Oral Health Care for your Children



# Foreword

We believe that all parents wish their children a bright future. Yet a bright future depends on good health, which includes good oral health.

By publishing this booklet, the Oral Health Promotion Division of the Department of Health aims to guide parents to help their children under the age of 7 to establish good oral care habits.

Children under the age of 7 are most eager to learn. You should take this early opportunity to help your children develop good oral care habits that will benefit a lifetime.

Both physically and psychologically, your child will undergo rapid development and changes between 0 and 6 years old. Therefore, we are providing, in this booklet, some oral health advice according to the stages of your child's development.



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# Oral Health Care for Children from 0 to 6 Years

## A Summary

Teeth will erupt in the mouth in sequence (P.6-7) as your child grows. A good oral health depends on good dietary habit, (P.18-23), proper oral cleaning (P.10-17), and regular dental check-ups (P.24-25). To protect your child from Early Childhood Caries (P.26-27), you need to take appropriate oral care measures at different stages of their growth.

Easy for caring your child's oral health by using the summary



Stage of Growth	Oral Hygiene	Dietary Habit	Oral Check-up
0-6 months Having no teeth	(P.10) → <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regularly wipe your baby's mouth every night</li> <li>To let your baby get used to having a clean mouth</li> </ul>	(P.20) → <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No limit to the number of meals</li> <li>Stop feeding when your baby is asleep. Never let your baby go to sleep with milk or drinks of any flavours in their mouth</li> </ul>	(P.24) → <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Check for changes in your baby's mouth when you clean it every night. Visit a dentist if necessary</li> </ul> 
Around 6 months The first primary tooth erupts	(P.14) → <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wipe your baby's mouth and the newly erupted teeth twice a day: in the morning and after the last meal at night</li> <li>Start brushing your baby's teeth with a soft infant toothbrush to get your baby accustomed to brushing</li> </ul>	(P.21) → <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Train your baby to regularly take 6-8 meals a day when they are 6 months old</li> <li>Do not feed your child with more than 6 regular meals a day when they get older</li> </ul> 	(P.24) → <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bring your baby to a dentist for the first dental check-up after they have their first tooth or when they are one year old</li> </ul> 
Around 1 1/2 years The first primary molar erupts	(P.14) → <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brush your child's teeth with a toothbrush and drinking water in the morning and before bed at night</li> </ul>	(P.21) → <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do not allow your baby to eat or drink whenever they want</li> <li>Help your baby to drink from a cup when they are around 7-9 months old</li> </ul>	(P.24) → <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Visit the dentist for regular check-ups every 6 to 12 months</li> </ul> 
2-6 years old Having a full set of 20 primary teeth	(P.16) → <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Let your child brush their own teeth every morning and before bed at night with a toothbrush and a pea-sized blob of children's fluoride toothpaste</li> <li>Remember to follow up by brushing your child's teeth every night</li> </ul>	(P.21) → <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Each day feed your child regularly with 3 meals in sufficient quantities</li> <li>Allow your child snack once in-between meals when necessary and drink water to quench thirst</li> </ul>	(P.24) → <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Visit the dentist for regular check-ups every 6 to 12 months</li> </ul>

# Sequence of Tooth Eruption

## and Cleaning Methods

Children with healthy primary teeth chew easily, speak clearly, and smile nicely. Having healthy primary teeth is crucial to the proper alignment of permanent teeth. Therefore, it is important to protect your child's primary teeth. Parents play a significant role in their children's oral care. You must understand the different stages of tooth eruption and take appropriate measures in cleaning your child's teeth according to the changes.

There are 20 primary teeth in total, which have begun to form in the fifth or sixth weeks during the mother's pregnancy. They generally make their appearance gradually after a baby is around 6-10 months old.

Some babies get their first tooth as early as in the fourth month after birth, and some get it around the age of one. Whichever way, it is normal and you need not worry too much.

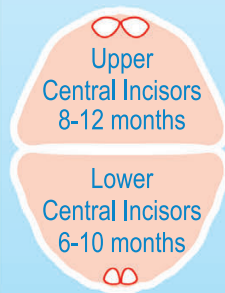


You should wipe your baby's mouth every night before the first tooth erupts



When the incisors erupt, you should continue to wipe your baby's mouth and teeth

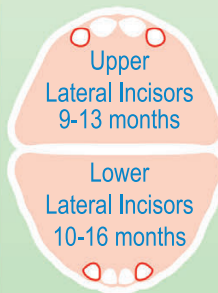
You can also try brushing your baby's teeth with a soft infant toothbrush



At this stage, your child has already 8 incisors and you should keep wiping your child's mouth and teeth

You should keep trying to brush your child's teeth

Check for any signs of molars. Brushing your child's teeth should, by all means, be started once the molars come in

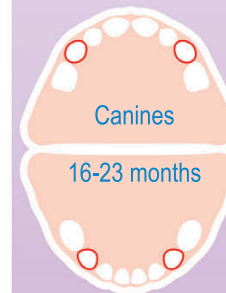


When molars come in, you should start brushing your child's teeth twice every day: in the morning and before bed at night



You should keep brushing your child's teeth twice a day

Allow your child to try brushing on their own first. Then finish off by brushing your child's teeth thoroughly for them



You should keep brushing your child's teeth twice a day

Allow your child to try brushing on their own first. Then finish off by brushing your child's teeth thoroughly for them

When your child is able to spit out, you can let your child brush their teeth with a pea-sized blob of children's fluoride toothpaste



# Discomfort

## during Tooth Eruption

Parents may feel anxious when their children get irritated or have a bad appetite during the tooth eruption period. Below are some suggestions that can help relieve the discomfort that your child may experience.

### Drooling

Wipe your child's mouth and change their bibs often to keep your child clean and dry.

### Gum irritation

Gum irritation is common during tooth eruption. To relieve the discomfort, your child would like to chew on a cool surface. You can let your child bite on a plastic liquid-filled teething ring, which should be cleaned and chilled, to reduce the irritation.

### Swollen gum

Swollen gum is normal during tooth eruption and the swollen part is usually firm. However, it is not normal if the swollen gum turns red or blue. In such case, parents must bring their children to see the dentist.

### Irritable

Children are easily irritated during tooth eruption. Parents should spend more time with their children. Playing games with them can distract your children from the irritation.

### Fever

Tooth eruption will not cause fever. However, children may pick up anything to chew during that time that increases their chance of getting an infection. If your child has symptoms like fever, runny nose and diarrhoea, you should take your child to see a doctor immediately.



# Steps for Cleaning Your Baby's Mouth

A newborn baby is a gift of joy for their parents. As parents, you want the best of everything for your baby. Children's oral care must be one of the things that most concern you.

The key to good oral health is starting an oral care program as early as birth for babies so as to establish good oral care habits before their teeth erupt.

**Parents should regularly clean their babies' mouths every night starting at birth**

## Steps for cleaning your baby's mouth

1. Prepare a piece of gauze, cotton or wash cloth and a glass of drinking water



2. Wash your hands thoroughly with soap

3. Wrap your finger with the gauze, cotton or wash cloth and damp it with water



4. Gently put your finger inside your baby's mouth. Rub the upper gum and then the lower gum once



### Aim

- ★ To keep your baby's mouth clean
- ★ To help your baby learn to brush and be accustomed to brushing when they grow up
- ★ To let your baby get used to having a clean mouth

# Problems for cleaning

## Baby's MOUTH



**If my baby does not want to open their mouth, then how can I clean their mouth?**

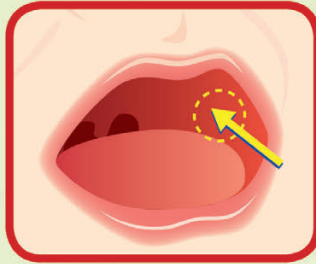
When you put your finger near your baby's mouth, your baby will slowly open their mouth as they think that you are trying to feed them. Try it with patience and you should be able to make your baby open their mouth.



**If ulcers (aphthous ulcer) are found inside my baby's mouth, should I stop wiping their mouth?**

You should keep wiping your baby's mouth avoiding the ulcer, or if not possible, then stop wiping until the ulcer has healed. In general, ulcers will heal in two weeks' time.

**I cannot reach the gums at the back of my baby's mouth. What should I do?**



You can slip your finger at the corner of your baby's mouth and then slide along the inside surface of the cheek until you reach the gums at the back of the mouth. At this point insert your finger gently in-between the upper and lower gums (as shown in the picture). Your baby will open their mouth and you can wipe the gums at the back.



**What if my baby bites my finger when I try to clean their mouth?**

It is natural for your baby to bite your finger when you try to put your finger into their mouth. Keep wiping their mouth and it will be opened again.



**When is the best time to wipe my baby's mouth?**

Since new born babies have not established a regular feeding pattern, it is difficult for parents to decide which meal will be their last meal of the day. Parents can then set a fixed time to wipe their baby's mouth every night. When your baby grows older (over 6 months old) and has established regular feeding habits, you can wipe your baby's mouth after the last meal of the day.



**I fed my baby and wiped their mouth before putting them to bed. Yet they did not want to go to bed and asked for milk again, what should I do?**

The reasons for wiping your baby's mouth after the last meal of the day are to get your baby accustomed to cleaning their mouth regularly and going to bed with a clean mouth. Generally, it is only out of habit that babies ask for milk before going to bed. Parents can feed them with water, or keep them preoccupied by patting, singing a song or telling a story.

# Brushing

## Your Child's Teeth



When **the first tooth appears**, parents should wipe their children's mouths and teeth every day.

Following the eruption of incisors, you can start brushing your child's teeth with a soft infant toothbrush and drinking water. You can also use an infant toothbrush (as shown in the picture) to get your child accustomed to toothbrushes, which will become essential when the molars come in.

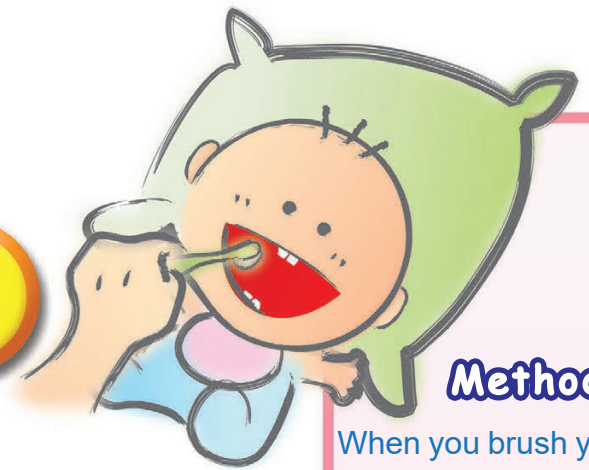


When **the first molar comes in**, parents must brush their children's teeth twice a day in the morning and before bed at night.

For children **under the age of 2**, parents should pick a toothbrush with soft bristles and the length of the toothbrush head should **not be longer than the diameter of a 10-cent coin**. Make sure your child knows how to spit out before using toothpaste for brushing.



A child lies on bed while the mother brushes their teeth



### Method

When you brush your child's teeth, you can either let your child sit on your lap or lay your child on a bed, so that you can see the teeth of your child clearly.



A child sits on the mother's lap while the mother brushes their teeth

# Brushing

## Your Child's Teeth

To effectively clean your child's teeth, it is important to use a correct toothbrushing method. It is best to follow a sequence during brushing:



Brush the **outer surfaces** of the teeth



Then, brush the **inner surfaces** of the teeth



Lastly, brush the **chewing surfaces** of all molars



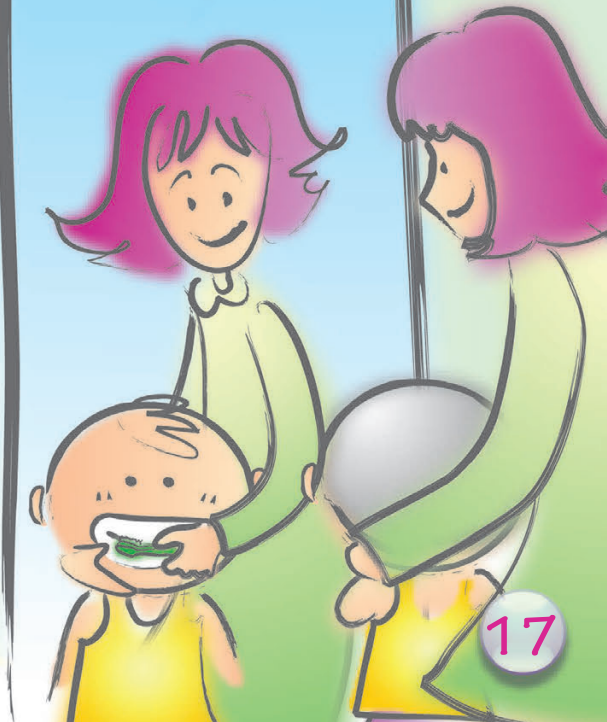
Parents should allow their children to learn to brush the teeth on their own when they are **2 years old**. Parents should get their children a new toothbrush, with the **length of the head measuring the diameter of a 20-cent coin**, when their children are between 2 - 6 years old. If your child knows how to spit out, you can let your child brush their teeth with a pea-sized blob of **children's fluoride toothpaste** in the morning and before bed at night. Since your child's fine motor skill is not yet well-developed, they might not be able to master the toothbrushing skill and you need to follow up by re-brushing their teeth thoroughly every night.



When you brush your child's teeth, you can stand behind them at the side and tilt their head slightly upwards by holding the chin with one hand.



When brushing the child's teeth, mother stands behind them at the side

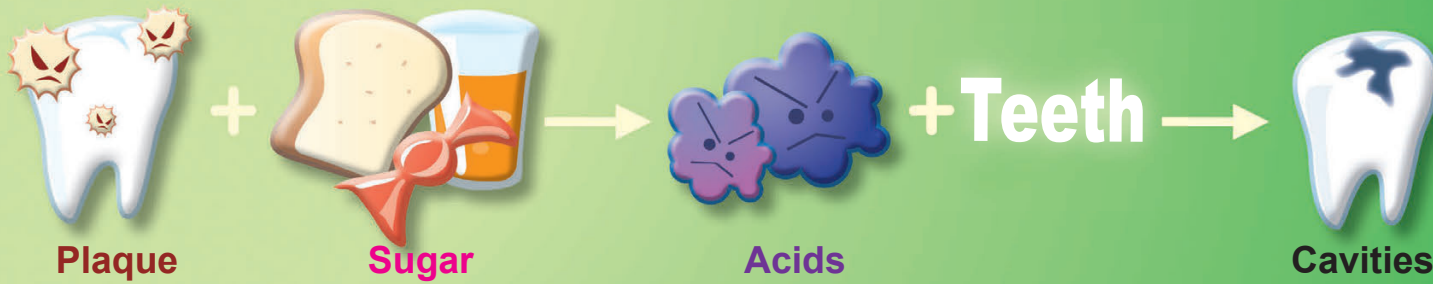


# Dietary Habit and Dental Health

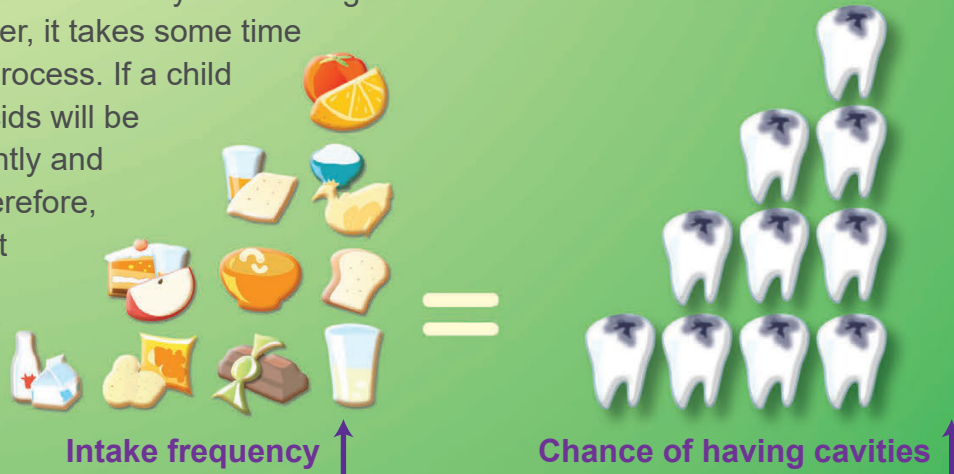
Many parents care about their children's nutrition a lot and feed their children every now and then. However, a bad dietary habit is the major cause of cavities!

The surface of our teeth is always covered with a thin film of bacteria known as **dental plaque**.

The bacteria in the dental plaque will metabolize sugar in our food or drinks to produce acid that will demineralize our tooth surface and cause **decay**.



Saliva can protect our teeth by neutralizing the acids. However, it takes some time to complete the process. If a child eats too often, acids will be produced constantly and cause decay. Therefore, the more frequent your child eats or drinks, the higher the chance of having decay cavities.



## Attention

Please note that each time your child eats, the chance of having cavities will increase accordingly. It is important that you help reduce the chance of your child getting cavities by reducing the number of meals your child takes.



### 0 to 6 months old

Parents should not limit the frequency of feeding their babies as babies below 6 months old are too young to establish a regular eating habit. This is especially true for infants, whose main source of nutrition is milk. Therefore parents should rather work on the principle of feeding.

Many parents put their babies to bed with a bottle of milk. This will greatly increase the chance for your baby to get cavities as your baby's teeth will always be bathed in milk, leading to constant attacks by acids. Parents should:

1. Stop feeding when your baby is asleep.
2. Never allow your baby to be put to sleep with a mouthful of milk or drink of any flavours.



### 6 months to 2 years old

At this stage, the primary teeth gradually erupt and children are allowed to take in solid food. It is important for parents to train their children to have regular dietary habits to prevent them from getting tooth decay and Early Childhood Caries (Please refer to P. 26):

1. Feed your baby on a regular basis. When your baby is 6 months old, divide their daily food, milk and other dietary consumption into 6 – 8 meals. Feed them only with drinking water between meals.
2. Do not feed your child with more than 6 regular meals a day when they get older.
3. Never allow your baby to be put to sleep with milk or drink of any flavours in their mouth.
4. Start helping your baby to drink from a cup when your baby is around 7 to 9 months old. It is best to wean your child from bottle before 18 months of age.

### After 2 years old

It is wonderful to see children growing day by day. Sometimes, parents may praise or encourage their children with snacks. However, this will increase the number of times your child eats or drinks and subsequently increase the chance of developing tooth decay. Parents should remember:




1. Not to let your child eat or drink too frequently – after 2 years old, a child should not be fed for more than 6 times a day.
2. Establish a regular dietary habit for your child – Each day, feed your child regularly with 3 meals in sufficient quantities. Provide your child with snacks only once between meals when necessary.
3. Your child's favourite snacks and drinks can be included in these meal and snack times.
4. Give only drinking water outside the meal and snack times.
5. After 2 years old, a child must be weaned from bottle to cup. Feed your child with cups and never allow your child to sleep with a bottle of milk or drink of any flavours.




**Regular**

# Dental Check-up


Parents always think that their babies' primary teeth will be replaced by permanent teeth so they need not have regular dental check-ups. In fact, parents should bring their children to the dentist for the first dental check-up **after they have their first tooth or when they are one year old**, and subsequently for regular dental check-ups **every 6 to 12 months**. The reasons are:




Dentist can give parents the oral care advice according to your child's condition to enable your child develops good oral care habits early.



A child might have already established a bad dietary and oral care habit, or even have been suffering from dental diseases, if they do not have regular dental check-ups until all primary teeth have erupted.



Early dental check-up makes it easier for the dentist to examine your child's teeth in future as a relationship is already established between your child and the dentist.

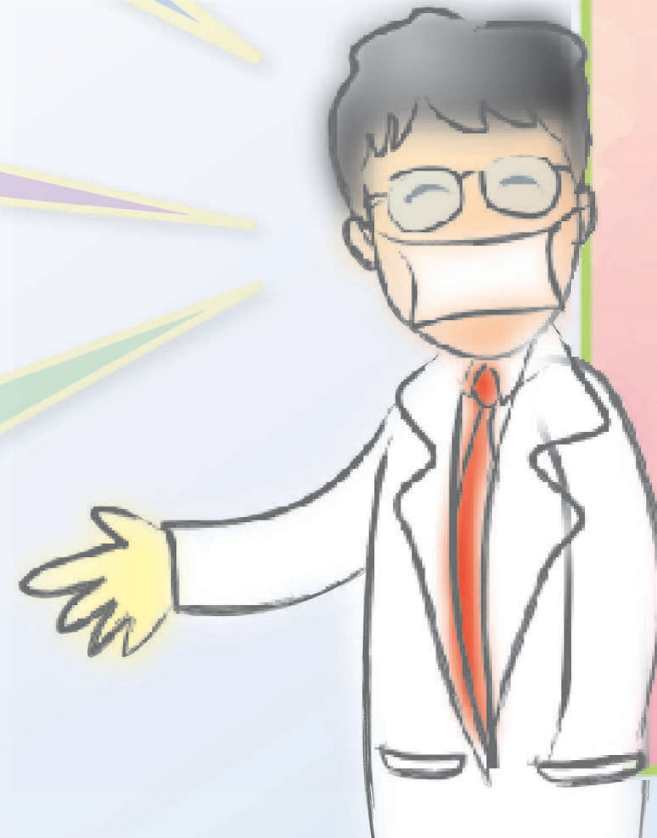


Dentists can monitor your child's oral health by their yearly dental records.



## Note

Parents can seek advice from friends and relatives for a reputable dentist.



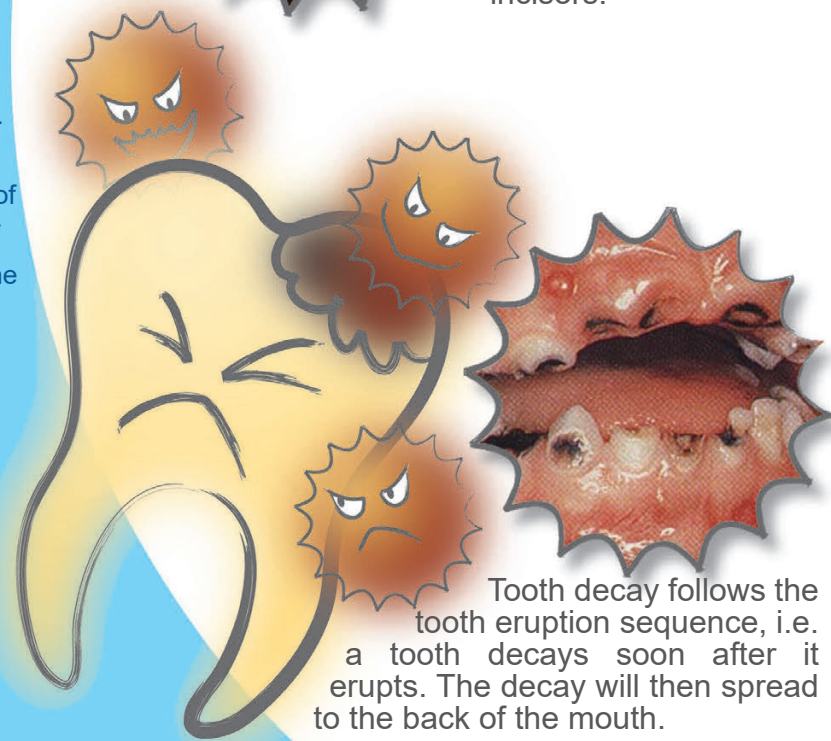
# Early Childhood Caries

According to the 2021 Oral Health Survey, among five-year-old children, one out of every two had decayed teeth, each having an average of 4.5 decayed teeth. Among those five-year-old children who had decayed teeth, 49% had more than or equal to 4 decayed teeth and belonged to the high risk group. The figure also represents 78.8% of the total number of decayed teeth in the age group.

Early Childhood Caries is an infant oral disease. The characteristic of this disease is the fast and widespread development of decayed teeth.



At first, large cavities are found on the surface of the upper incisors.



Tooth decay follows the tooth eruption sequence, i.e. a tooth decays soon after it erupts. The decay will then spread to the back of the mouth.

## Consequences of having Early Childhood Caries:

Early Childhood Caries can result in **pain, loss of appetite** and **emotional irritation**. If parents do not seek treatment for their children, bacterial infection can extend to the pulp, causing infection of the pulp and abscess. The bacteria can also **infect the permanent teeth** that are growing inside the alveolar bone through the roots of the primary teeth. When the condition gets severe, it can infect the child's cheeks, **causing pain and swollen cheeks**. At this stage, the child has to receive complicated dental treatment, which may include removal of the primary teeth. **This will seriously affect the child's chewing ability, speech, alignment of permanent teeth and appearance, resulting in the loss of self-confidence.**



To protect children from getting Early Childhood Caries, parents should pay attention to the 3 aspects below:

### Good eating habits

Never put your baby to bed with teeth bathing in milk or drink of any flavours. Start helping your baby to drink from a cup when your baby is around 7 to 9 months old. Do not feed your child with more than 6 regular meals a day when they get older. Provide only 3 regular meals in sufficient quantities to your child after they are 2 years old, give only one snack between meals when necessary.



### Clean your child's mouth properly every day

Starting at birth, wipe your baby's mouth with a piece of damp gauze, cotton or cloth. Wipe also their teeth and try brushing when the first tooth erupts. Start using a soft-bristle toothbrush when the molars come in. When your child knows how to spit out, let them brush their teeth by themselves with a pea-sized blob of children's fluoride toothpaste twice a day, in the morning and before bed at night. Follow up by re-brushing your child's teeth once.



### Regular dental check-ups

Parents should bring their children to the dentist for the first dental check-up after they have their first tooth or when they are one year old. After that, visit the dentist regularly at least once a year.



**Q** My child does not want to brush their teeth, how can I establish a toothbrushing habit for them?

**A** It takes time to establish a good oral care habit for your child. Parents must be *patient* as brushing teeth in the morning and before bed at night is a crucial habit of your child. It will benefit them for a lifetime.

- Parents should find out the reasons behind and think of ways to *guide them to exercise the good habit*.
- *To create a cheerful environment for toothbrushing* by singing songs while brushing your child's teeth or making it a game by taking turns in brushing the child's teeth.
- Don't forget to *praise your child for the good work* when they are willing to brush their teeth.
- Allow your child to pick their favourite toothbrush and toothpaste in order to *increase their interest in toothbrushing*.
- *Be a role model* as your child always wants to follow what you do.



**Q** Will it reduce the chance of getting tooth decay by drinking water after eating?

**A** Acid will be produced within a short period of time whenever we eat or drink. The acid will demineralize our tooth surface and cause decay. Since water cannot neutralize the acid produced, drinking water after eating cannot reduce the chance of getting tooth decay.



**Q** Do I have to wipe the surface of my child's tongue when I clean their mouth?

**A** If you found *some traces of milk on your child's tongue*, you can wipe it off with a damp gauze. However, be careful not to poke your finger too far back into your child's mouth as you may touch their sensitive area, causing them to vomit.

**Q** When should my child start using the cup? And why do they need a cup?

**A** • To prevent your baby from Early Childhood Caries, you should help your baby to drink from a cup when they are around *7 to 9 months old*.

• It is best to completely wean your child from the bottle before they are 18 months old.

• Using a cup, *the time for milk and other flavoured drinks to stay in your child's mouth is shorter than that when using a bottle*.





**Q What causes discoloration of infant teeth?**

- A**
- Tooth discoloration can either be caused by accumulation of external pigment or colour change within the tooth substance. It is common to find yellow, orange and black stain on the tooth surface. The stain is usually caused by *poor oral hygiene* in which accumulated plaque absorbs the colour from food. This type of stain can simply be brushed off by toothbrushing. For the stain, it is because the tooth surface has absorbed the colour from food. Apart from affecting the appearance, it will not cause any harm to the teeth. It can be removed by professional cleaning.
  - Internal discoloration of teeth *mostly originates from dentine and pulp*. For example, a tooth may appear grey because of pulpal necrosis, a consequence of decomposition of blood pigment that penetrates into the pulp after trauma or extensive tooth decay. If you find a grey tooth in your child's mouth, you should bring your child to consult a dentist.



Black stains appear on tooth surfaces



Tooth discoloration due to the death of dental pulp after trauma



**Q What is fluoride? Is it good for children's health?**

- A**
- Dental plaque in our mouth can act on the sugar in food to produce acids that cause the loss of our teeth minerals. Fluoride helps in re-mineralization which aids in repairing early decay.
  - Fluoride *strengthens* children's developing *teeth* by increasing their resistance to acid attack, and therefore *reducing the chances of getting tooth decay*.
  - The drinking water in Hong Kong has already been added with fluoride. It helps to prevent tooth decay if parents use drinking water to cook and reconstitute the milk.



**Q What to do if my child's teeth have a trauma?**

- A**
- Parents must stay calm and comfort the panic-stricken child. Bring your child to the dentist *as soon as possible for a detailed oral examination*, so that the dentist can carry out suitable treatment and follow up.

**Q Is it harmful to swallow toothpaste?**

- A**
- One of the aims of using fluoride toothpaste is to allow the teeth to absorb the fluoride in the toothpaste and strengthen the teeth to prevent tooth decay. Therefore, it will *not* cause any harm for a child to swallow the toothpaste accidentally. However, *absorbing too much fluoride* may lead to *dental fluorosis*, in which white spots will appear on your child's permanent teeth and affect their appearance. So, make sure your child gets used to spitting out before using *children's fluoride toothpaste* which contains less fluoride. *Use only a small amount of toothpaste every time, a pea-sized blob* will be enough. Remember to teach your child to spit the toothpaste out after brushing their teeth.





**If you want more information on children oral care,  
you can visit our Toothclub website at:**

**[www.toothclub.gov.hk](http://www.toothclub.gov.hk)**