



Caring for Your Child's Teeth—0-12 Months

Caring for your infant's gums well before the first tooth erupts is critical to preventing tooth decay. The following information can help you to prevent decay and ensure your child's oral health during the first 12 months.

Why are baby teeth so important?

Baby teeth, also known as primary teeth, serve as “placeholders” for adult (secondary) teeth. If they are lost too early, due to tooth decay, the remaining teeth can shift and block adult teeth from coming in.

How does tooth decay affect infants?

Decay in baby teeth can cause pain, affect speech development and may make eating painful—resulting in poor nutrition. If left untreated, decay can spread, resulting in life-threatening infection.

What steps should I take to protect my child?

- **Practice good oral hygiene**—after feedings, gently wipe your baby's gums with a clean washcloth or brush the gums, using water, with a soft bristle baby toothbrush.
- **Do not share food or drinks with your baby**—it is possible for parents to pass germs that cause cavities and gum disease to the baby's mouth. This can happen anytime there is a saliva exchange, such as when parents share a child's spoon or sippy cup.
- **Do not put your child to sleep with a bottle**—choking can occur and so can baby bottle tooth decay. In fact, it is common in infants who are left to sleep with a bottle to suffer from tooth decay. The sugar from the milk or formula turns into acid, which attacks the tooth enamel, resulting in decay.
- **Ask about fluoride**—once your child's first tooth appears, it is important to ensure that the baby is getting enough fluoride to help strengthen the adult teeth forming in the gums. Depending on the water supply in your area, your dentist or pediatrician may prescribe a very low dose fluoride supplement.
- **Schedule a dental check-up**—schedule an appointment at our practice before your baby's first birthday.

How can I find out more about protecting my infant's oral health?

We, at Pediatric Dentistry of Clifton Park, are here to answer any questions or concerns you may have. Your child's oral health is our priority!

Sources: Infant Oral Health Guide; Children's Hospital Boston Children's Hospital Primary Care clinic; Wanessa Risko, MD, ScD, Romi Wedbster, MD MPH, Man Wai Ng, DDS MPH. 9-2006; How to Prevent Tooth Decay in Your Baby; American Academy of Pediatrics, copyright 2007; First Steps to a Healthy Smile; American Academy of Pediatrics, copyright 2008