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**DENTAL CARE FOR  
MOTHER AND BABY**

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## **Q. Why is dental care for mother and baby important?**

**A.** Your gum health can suffer during pregnancy. It is also important to look after both your and your baby's dental health in the early months of your baby's life to help make sure you both have healthy mouths in the future. There have also been links found between good gum health and good birth outcomes: for example, you may be less likely to have your baby early if you have healthy gums.

## **Q. Do I need to see my dental team during my pregnancy?**

**A.** Yes. Because of hormone changes during pregnancy, some women's dental health needs more care during this time. For example, you may notice that your gums seem to bleed more easily.

## **Q. Why are my gums bleeding?**

**A.** You may notice that your gums become sore and swollen during pregnancy, and they may bleed. This is due to hormone changes in your body. This means that you must keep your teeth and gums clean and visit your dentist regularly. You may also need appointments with the dental team for thorough cleaning to help keep plaque and tartar from building up, and for advice on caring for your teeth at home.

## **Q. Is dental treatment safe during pregnancy?**

**A.** Yes. There should be no problems with routine treatment. If you are not sure what your treatment would involve, talk about all the options with your dentist. Some current guidelines suggest that old amalgam fillings should not be removed during pregnancy, and that new ones should not be put in. Talk to your dentist about having a different type of filling if you are unsure.

## **Q. What if I need dental x-rays?**

**A.** Usually, dentists prefer to avoid x-rays during pregnancy if possible.

However, if you need root canal treatment, you may need to have an x-ray.

### **Q. Does pregnancy cause damage to teeth?**

**A.** No. It is not true that pregnancy causes tooth problems through a lack of calcium, or that you will lose one tooth for each child you have.

### **Q. What about smoking and alcohol in pregnancy?**

**A.** Smoking and drinking in pregnancy can lead to an underweight baby and also affect your unborn baby's dental health. An underweight baby is more likely to have poor teeth because of the tooth enamel not being formed properly. It is worth remembering that the adult teeth are already growing in the jaws, below the baby teeth, when your baby is born. So some babies whose mothers smoke and drink in pregnancy can have badly formed adult teeth too.

### **Q. What about my diet during pregnancy?**

**A.** When you are pregnant you must have a healthy, balanced diet that has all the vitamins and minerals you and your baby need.

You need to have a good diet so that your baby's teeth can develop. Calcium in particular is important to produce strong bones and healthy teeth. Calcium is in milk, cheese and other dairy products.

If you have morning sickness, you may want to eat 'little and often'. If you are often sick, rinse your mouth afterwards with plain water to prevent the acid in your vomit attacking your teeth. Try to avoid sugary and acidic foods and drinks between meals. This will protect your teeth against decay and acid erosion.

### **Q. When will my baby's teeth appear?**

**A.** Most babies will start getting their first teeth between 4-7 months. Some baby's may get their teeth earlier or later than this.

The last teeth to appear (the second primary molars) usually come in at around 2.5 – 3yrs and these complete the full set of 20 baby teeth.

At around 6 yrs (this may be earlier or later in some children), the adult teeth will start coming through.

At this stage, your child will start getting their first 'adult' molar teeth behind the existing baby teeth and also will start losing the front upper and lower baby teeth, which will be replaced by adult teeth.

Your child will go through few years of having a mixture of baby and adult teeth in their mouth. The last of the baby teeth to be lost (generally, all baby teeth are lost and replaced by permanent teeth) are the second primary molars, and this happens around the age of 12yrs.

### **Q. Is teething painful?**

**A.** Most children do suffer from teeth pains. Babies may have a high temperature when they are teething and their cheeks may look red and warm to touch.

There are special teething gels that you can use to help reduce the pain. There are some that contain a mild analgesic (painkiller). You can apply the gel using your finger, and gently massage it onto your baby's gums.

Teething rings can also help to soothe your baby. Certain teething rings can be cooled in the fridge, which may help. But, as teething pains can vary, it is best to check with your dental team or doctor.

### **Q. When should I take my baby to visit the dental team for the first time?**

**A.** Your baby's own check-ups can start any time from about 6 months or from when the teeth start to appear. Starting check up's early help the baby to get used to the dental environment and surroundings. Your dental team will be able to advice to help prevent your baby from getting avoidable dental problems.

### **Q. Does breast feeding affect my baby's teeth?**

**A.** Breast milk is the best food for babies, and it is recommended that you just give your baby breast milk during the first four to six months of their life.

At 4-6 months old, babies can start eating some solid foods. You should still keep breast feeding, or give breast milk substitutes/ formula milk (or both), after the first six months.

It is widely accepted that breast milk is the best food for your baby – you should however, be careful about ‘on demand’ breast feeding through the night, once your baby’s teeth are erupted, as there is some evidence to show that this practice can cause tooth decay. It is important to start cleaning your baby’s teeth twice daily once they have erupted.

### **Q. What about bottle feeding?**

**A.** When feeding with a bottle, you must sterilise the bottle properly. Many breast milk substitutes/ formula milks contain sugar and you should clean your baby’s teeth after the last feed at night.

Try to leave an hour after the feed before cleaning your baby’s teeth. Never add sugar or put sugary drinks into the bottle. Bottle feeding with drinks containing sugar can lead to ‘bottle caries’ (tooth decay). A baby is not born with a sweet tooth and will only have a taste for sugar if it is given at an early age.

During the day, milk and water are the best drinks for teeth. If your baby gets thirsty during the night, the best drink is water. Regular bottle feeding through the night with milk or other drinks can also lead to ‘bottle caries’.

### **A note about the water**

In Kenya, it is important to keep the fluoride (F) levels in the drinking water low, as your child will get fluoride from many other sources, including their fruit and vegetables and toothpaste. A little bit of fluoride is good for the teeth and makes them stronger and more resistant to decay, but if the fluoride content is higher, than the developing adult teeth can get a condition called fluorosis. In its’ mildest form, this will appear as white lines/specks on the teeth. More severe forms of fluorosis can result in break down and brown discolouration of the teeth.

If you are giving your child bottled water, use one with less than 0.5mg/l F in the water. If using borehole water, it should go through UV/reverse osmosis filtration. Other water should be boiled and filtered.

Borehole water can be high in a lot of minerals and can sometimes cause external staining on the teeth.

## **Q. When should I stop bottle feeding?**

**A.** Stopping bottle feeding early can help stop your baby from developing dental problems. Try to get your baby to drink milk or water from a special cup by the time they are about 6 months old, or when they are able to sit up and can hold things on their own.

## **Q. What solid foods are better for my baby?**

**A.** Savoury foods such as cheese, pasta and vegetables are better than sweet foods. Food that doesn't contain sugar is better for your baby's teeth. Speak to your doctors for more advice about a balanced diet for your baby.

If your child has a drink in between meals, it is important to give them only water or milk instead of sugary or acidic drinks, which can cause decay. Snacks in between meals should also be kept sugar free if possible.

## **Q. When should I start cleaning my baby's teeth?**

**A.** As soon as teething has started, you should start cleaning your child's teeth. Babies are obviously not able to clean their own teeth, and children will need help to make sure that they clean them properly until they are about 7 years old.

## **Q. How should I clean my baby's teeth?**

**A.** Start cleaning your baby's mouth even before his/her teeth come in. Wipe the gums off after each feeding with a warm, wet washcloth or a dampened piece of gauze wrapped around your finger.

You can also buy thimble-like, soft rubbery devices (they fit over your index finger) to use for rubbing off excess food.

As soon as the first baby teeth appear, you should start to brush/clean them.

At first, you may find it easier to use a piece of clean gauze or cloth wrapped around your forefinger. As more teeth appear, you will need to use a baby toothbrush. Use a small smear of toothpaste and gently massage it around the teeth and gums.

It can be easier to clean your baby's teeth if you cradle their head in your arms in front of you.

As your child gets older, it may be difficult to do it this way, but you can gradually give more responsibility to them for cleaning their teeth.

It is important to brush teeth twice a day with a toothpaste.

Check with your dental team if you are unsure about how to look after your baby's teeth.

### **Q. What if my baby sucks his thumb or needs a dummy/pacifier?**

**A.** If you can, avoid using a dummy, soother or pacifier and discourage thumb sucking. These can eventually cause problems with how the teeth grow and develop. And this may need treatment with braces when your child gets older.

If your baby does use a dummy, soother or pacifier, never dip these into fruit syrups, honey, fruit juices or anything containing sugars, particularly at bedtime. The harmful sugars and acids can attack your baby's newly formed teeth and cause decay.

Speak to your dental team if your child does suck their thumb or uses a dummy, soother or pacifier.

### **Q. What if my baby damages a tooth?**

**A.** If your child damages a tooth, contact your dental team straight away. If the damage happens outside normal opening hours, attend a hospital emergency department and then arrange to see your dentist as soon as possible.

If a baby tooth is knocked out, it is important not to put it back into the socket as doing this can lead to damage of the developing adult tooth.

Your dental team will be able to advise you on the treatment needed for the damaged tooth and possible consequences of the trauma.

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