

Fact Sheet

Tooth development

Before birth

A baby's first teeth (primary teeth) begin to form in the 16th week of pregnancy. They are almost completely formed in the gums at birth. The strength of the primary teeth depends on the mother's health and diet during pregnancy. Pregnant mothers need to eat a well-balanced diet. A good diet will provide the developing baby with the right amount of fluoride.

Primary or 'baby' teeth

The primary teeth begin to come through the gums when the child is about six months old, but this can vary from infant to infant. There are twenty of these teeth. It is important to care for teeth properly from the start. If a child's diet contains too much sugar there may be problems with both the gums and teeth.

Second teeth (permanent teeth)

The permanent back teeth begin to come through at about six years of age. These are sometimes called the 'six-year-old molars'. They come up behind the primary molars. The permanent front teeth also begin to come through at about six years of age. All permanent teeth are important and a lot of care should be taken to keep them free from decay.

Fluoride

Fluoride is important for healthy teeth. Most water supplies have fluoride added. However, some rural areas may not have fluoride added to the water supply. If you live in a rural area you should check with your local council.

If your water has no fluoride in it

You may need to add fluoride to the child's diet after one year of age. Ask your dentist for advice. Breast-fed or bottle-fed babies (one year - four years) need at least 250ml of fluoridated water every day (about one cup) to get the right amount of fluoride. This may include water added to baby's bottle, or water added to juice or vegetables. Older children need to drink more.

Teething

Many babies have no trouble when teeth come through the gums. Other babies get very upset. They might sleep badly, have red cheeks, be fussy and eat less. Their gums might look swollen and sore. They may have slightly loose bowel motions. Your teething baby needs extra comfort. Be patient and loving. Rubbing the gums with ice can help. If your child is in pain, ask your Dentist, Child and Family Health Nurse or Chemist for advice on what to give.

Bedtime bottles may cause problems

Baby's bedtime bottle of juices, cordials and other flavoured drinks, or even milk, may lead to tooth decay. Bacteria in the mouth can use these sweet drinks to decay the teeth while the child sleeps. If a baby needs a bottle to go to sleep, replace it with a bottle containing water.

Remember

- Pregnant mothers need to eat a well balanced diet.
- Brush twice a day.
- Drink fluoridated water every day.
- Visit your dentist regularly.

This fact sheet is for education purposes only.
Please consult with your doctor or other health professional
to make sure this information is right for your child.

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the
children's
hospital at Westmead

www.chw.edu.au

 **SYDNEY
CHILDREN'S
HOSPITAL**
RANDWICK

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HUNTER CHILDREN'S HEALTH NETWORK

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