



Coping with Teething

When a baby begins teething, there is no set pattern on when it will begin, how long it will take and how painful it will be. For one baby cutting a tooth might happen overnight without pain, while another child might have to go through a long, drawn out and painful experience. You may sometimes visibly see a rise or lump in the gum for several weeks, while sometimes there may be no visible clue at all until the tooth actually appears. For some babies the teeth come in one at a time while for others there will be several come all at once.

The process of teething often follows hereditary patterns, so if either parent teethed early or late, your baby may follow the same pattern. On average the first tooth comes in during the seventh month, although it can arrive as early as three months, as late as a year, or in rare cases even earlier or later.

In total there are twenty primary (first) teeth- also known as Milk Teeth- which is twelve less than the full set of thirty-two permanent teeth adults have. Most children have a full set of primary teeth by the time they are around two or three years old. These teeth usually last until about the age of six, when the teeth that were first to appear become loose and fall out as the second teeth begin to push through the gums. The primary teeth continue falling out until roughly the age of twelve. Again, these ages mentioned above are only averages and your child may follow an earlier or later pattern. The following is the most common pattern in which your baby's teeth will usually appear.

Age	Teeth	Position
6 to 7 months	Incisors	Two central bottom & Two central top teeth.
7 to 9 months	Two more incisors	Top & bottom; making four top & four bottom teeth in all.
10 to 14 months	First molars	Double teeth for chewing
15 to 18 months	Canines	The pointed teeth or "fangs"
2 to 3 years	Second molars	The second set of double teeth at the back

SYMPTOMS

The symptoms of teething vary from child to child. Because of these different experiences, parents and physicians often disagree as to the symptoms of teething and how painful it is. The list below shows symptoms that a teething baby may experience. While most parents usually agree that some or all of the symptoms below happened around the time of teething, it is still recommended that if your baby experiences any of these symptoms you check with your GP/HV to rule out other possible causes for the symptoms.

Irritability: As the sharp tooth rises closer to the surface your baby's gums may become increasingly more sore and painful, leading to your baby being very fussy. The pain and discomfort is most often worse during the first teeth coming in and later when the molars come in because of their bigger size. This is most often the case since babies become accustomed to the sensations of teething and learn to live with them. But you may find your baby may be fussy during the whole time that every tooth comes in. Every child reacts differently.

Drooling: From three to four months of age, you may see your baby start drooling more often than she normally does. Teething stimulates drooling, which is often worse with some babies than others.

Coughing: The extra saliva can cause your baby to occasionally cough or gag. This is usually nothing to worry about as long as your baby seems fine and shows no signs of a cold or flu and does not run a high fever.

Chin rash: If your baby is a big drooler, the constant contact with saliva can cause the skin around the chin and mouth to become irritated. To help prevent this, gently wipe your baby's mouth and chin periodically throughout the day.

Biting & gnawing: A baby that is teething will gnaw and gum down on anything she or he can get their mouth around. The counter pressure from biting on something helps relieve the pressure from under the gums.

Cheek rubbing and ear pulling: Pain in the gums may travel to the ears and cheeks particularly when the back molars begin coming in. This is why you may see your baby rubbing their cheeks or pulling at their ears. However, keep in mind that pulling at an ear can also be a sign of an ear infection.

Diarrhoea: While many will doctors/researchers disagree that this is a symptom of teething, most parents usually notice slightly looser bowel movements when a baby is teething. While the recent study done by the Children's Hospital in Australia found this to be the most common symptom of teething, there are still many people that will agree and disagree with this recent study. It is believed that the most likely cause of this is the extra saliva swallowed, which then loosens the stool. Be sure and report any diarrhoea to your doctor that lasts more than two bowel movements.

Low-grade fever: A fever is another symptom that doctors are sometimes hesitant to directly link with teething. But there are many parents who will disagree with this and find their baby gets a slight fever while teething. The best thing to do is be extra safe and notify your doctor if a fever last more than two days.

Not sleeping well: With teething pain happening during the day and night, you may find your child wakes more often at night when the pain gets bad enough. Most parents agree that the night waking happens more often during the first set of teeth and with the molars.

Cold like symptoms (runny nose, etc.): Some parents find that their baby will show signs of having a cold. Runny noses, coughing and general cold symptoms are believed to come from the baby having their hands in their mouth more often. Play it safe and always notify your doctor if symptoms such as this occur.

HOW YOU CAN HELP.

There are several things that you can try to help ease the pain of teething; some work and some don't, but most parents agree they're always worth a try. Teething rings, water filled and chilled rubber teething toys or mom and dad's fingers can all provide counter pressure that can sometimes bring relief. Offering your baby a cold bottle of water can also help. If sucking on the bottle bothers your child, offer a cold cup of water. The water can also help replenish your baby's fluid if they're drooling a lot or have loose bowel movements.

Cold food has also been found to be helpful by some parents. Chilled apple sauce, yogurt and pureed peaches may be more appealing to your baby and also more nutritious than a chilled teething ring.

When nothing else helps, you can also turn to Infant Calpol. Teething pain medicines that are applied to the gums can also provide some relief. Some parents say these types of products work great, while other parents will say it doesn't. Also check with your doctor before giving this type of over the counter pain relief to your baby.

The teething process will come and go just like so many other things with new babies. Keep trying different things until you find what provides the best relief for your child. You will gradually learn what your baby's process of teething is and what will help or not.

BRUSHING BABY'S TEETH

How soon should you start? The baby teeth help to guide the permanent teeth that come through about 6 yrs of age so it is important that they are looked after well. Decay in milk teeth can spread to the bone beneath and affect the health of the adult teeth. Before your baby's teeth appear, it will do no harm to keep his gums clean and healthy. You can use a soft, clean cloth, cotton bud or finger swab (available from the British Dental Health Foundation) to wipe away any milk on his gums and gently clean them.

At about 3-4 months you may wish to massage your baby's gums with special trainer brushes. These look like toothbrushes but have rubber heads and are designed to stimulate the gums and introduce your baby to the feel of a toothbrush. They do not harm his gums or teeth and can be given for your baby to chew on before the first teeth emerge. **N.B.** Never leave your child unattended with these because of the risk of choking.

How should you brush your child's teeth? When your child has two or more teeth you should use a soft baby brush with a pea sized amount of family fluoride toothpaste. Brush on the inner sides of the teeth and between the teeth and on the biting surfaces at the back of the mouth. Always check to see if there are any new teeth that need cleaning. Remember to brush gently as babies have tender gums.

How often should you brush? Initially when there are only one or two clean them at least once a day but as more teeth appear this can be increased to twice a day. Dentists recommend that you continue to supervise your child brushing his teeth until the age of 7.

Help your child have healthy teeth by:

- Starting to brush them as soon as the first tooth appears.
- Use toothpaste-dentists recommend a child's toothpaste with fluoride.
- Use sugar free medicines if needed.
- Limiting sugary snacks to meal times or special treats. Snacks that are eaten quickly rather than those that stay in the mouth (lollipops) are better.
- Watch out for acids in drinks such as fruit juices and fizzy drinks as these can have an effect on teeth especially when combined with sugar.
- Visit a dentist for check ups. Children can be seen by a dentist as soon as the first tooth appears but it may be helpful to have him accompany you when you go. Children should visit the dentist every 3-6 months and their treatment is.
- Healthy teeth need a diet rich in calcium and vitamin D which your baby can get from dairy produce, oily fish and eggs.