

### Why should I clean my baby's teeth?

Although babies aren't born with teeth, their baby teeth (called "primary teeth") are already formed under their gums, waiting to begin coming in at about 6 months and aren't all in until about 2 years of age. Your baby's teeth, gums and tongue are very important for eating, learning to speak and for growth. Baby teeth also hold the space for the permanent teeth to begin coming in at about 5 to 6 years of age. Cleaning your baby's teeth now will also get your child used to using a toothbrush.

### Birth to 6 Months

You can start cleaning your baby's gums and tongue beginning at about 3 months of age. Wrap a soft, warm, moist wash cloth or gauze around your index finger. While cradling your baby in your free arm, gently wipe the gums and tongue in a light circular motion to remove the plaque and food debris. This should be done after each feeding.



**Toothpaste should not be used at this age.**

### 6 to 12 Months:

By this age, your baby may have a few teeth on the bottom and may even have some on the top. When your baby's first tooth appears, trade in the soft cloth for a baby toothbrush. Be sure to use a SOFT bristled brush and try to make brushing fun! Continue to clean in circular motions allowing the brush to clean the teeth, the gums and the tongue.



**A smear of fluoride toothpaste should be used when the first tooth erupts.**

***If your child uses a pacifier, do not dip it in honey or any sugary substances; this can cause cavities. Milk, formula, fruit juices and soda contain sugary substances that can cause cavities, too. Don't put your baby to bed with a bottle or sippy cup with any of these or other sugary substances; plain water is the way to go.***

### Why brush my toddler's teeth?

Your toddler is going to have 20 teeth by the time they are 3 years old and won't lose their last baby tooth until about age 12. That's a very long time and a really good reason to take care in cleaning your toddler's teeth, gums and tongue! Baby teeth are important for proper chewing and digestion, speech and good self image.

Getting to know your toddler's mouth, what teeth they have and what they look like will help you to recognize any changes.

***Remember to avoid sharing items such as forks or spoons, straws and cups with your toddler to prevent spreading the bacterial germs that cause dental disease.***

### 12 to 24 Months:

At this age your toddler should have his or her toothbrush available to "pretend or play" toothbrushing along with you. Children this age have fun imitating what they see, but remember that at this age, toddlers are not ready to brush their teeth on their own. Having a brushing buddy (a parent, caretaker or older sibling) will be helpful.



***Children 6 months to 3 years should only use a small smear. Over the age of 3, use only a "pea-sized" amount of fluoride toothpaste.***

***Using a circular motion, be sure that all sides of the tooth are cleaned, and don't forget the tongue. Toothbrushing should be done at least two times each day and most importantly at bedtime using a SOFT bristled toothbrush. Remember to have your child SPIT then RINSE with water to avoid swallowing the toothpaste.***



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### 24 to 36 Months:

"I can do it myself!" Sound familiar? At this age, children want to do everything like the 'big kids,' including bathing and brushing their teeth on their own. Unfortunately, they just don't have the



coordination to get their teeth, gums and tongue clean by themselves. Allowing your toddler to "play brush" his or her own teeth is fine, as long as you re brush afterwards.

***Continue to brush with a SOFT bristled toothbrush at least two times each day, using a "pea-sized" amount of fluoride toothpaste.***

***With busier schedules, preschool and play dates, it is extremely important to maintain your toothbrushing routine. Remember to***

***have your child SPIT then RINSE with water to avoid swallowing the toothpaste.***



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### 36 Months to 5 Years:

Children generally need help with toothbrushing until about age 6 or 7. At this age they have developed the hand coordination and knowledge to brush properly by themselves. Until then, you still need to help them with their brushing each day. To encourage this hand coordination, stand behind your child to offer support while he or she positions the toothbrush.



**Always use a SOFT bristled toothbrush encouraging large circular strokes around the teeth, gums and tongue; and don't forget the "pea sized" amount of fluoride toothpaste.**

**Remember to have your child SPIT then RINSE with water to avoid swallowing the toothpaste. Learning to brush in front of a mirror may be helpful, as will a**

**stepping stool to help your child reach the sink.**



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