

Teething trouble

Every baby goes through it

The time when babies get their first primary teeth (milk teeth) varies. A few are born with a tooth already, whilst others have no teeth at one year. Teeth generally start to show when a child is four to nine months old, although every baby develops at their own pace. This is known as teething. Some babies show few signs while others find it more uncomfortable. Some teeth grow with no pain or discomfort at all. At other times you may notice that the gum is sore and red where the tooth is coming through, or that one cheek is flushed. Your baby may dribble, gnaw and chew a lot, or just be fretful.

Some people attribute a wide range of symptoms to teething, such as diarrhoea and fever. However, there is no research to prove that these other symptoms are linked. You know your baby best. If their behaviour seems unusual, or their symptoms are severe or causing you concern, talk to your health visitor. Do not soothe your baby by giving biscuits to chew on or a dummy dipped in a sugary substance. This encourages your baby to have a sweet tooth and is damaging to teeth that are growing.

Think about your child's tooth care routine. You can brush their teeth with a soft baby toothbrush and a smear of fluoride family toothpaste. Make sure you see your dentist regularly and discuss your child's oral health with them (see 'good oral health' for more information).

Pharmacist says

If your baby is uncomfortable, you can buy some medicine from your local pharmacy. These medicines contain a small dose of painkiller, such as paracetamol, to help ease any discomfort. The medicine should be sugar-free. Make sure you read all instructions and the product is suitable for the age of your child.

You can try sugar-free teething gel rubbed on the gum.

Health visitor says

It can help to give your baby something hard to chew on, such as a teething ring. Teething rings give your baby something to safely chew on, which may help to ease their discomfort or pain. Some teething rings can be cooled first in the fridge.

All sorts of things are put down to teething - rashes, crying, bad temper, runny nose and extra dirty nappies. Be careful not to explain away what might be the signs of illness by assuming it's just teething.

Dentist's tooth care tips

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1. Start brushing as soon as the first tooth appears.
2. Clean teeth twice every day, for two minutes, especially at night.
3. Reduce sugars to mealtimes only.
4. Visit the dentist every six months or as recommended by your dentist.
5. Don't add sugar, give juice drinks, fizzy drinks or tea in a bottle. Your baby may still like using a bottle as a comforter and suck away on it for hours, giving sugar and acid plenty of time to damage teeth.
6. From six months of age infants should be introduced to drinking from a free-flow cup, and from age one year feeding from a bottle should be discouraged.
7. Find your nearest NHS dentist visit www.nhs.uk/dentist

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My baby has red cheeks and seems a bit frustrated and grumpy.

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Have you asked your health visitor about teething? Have you discussed options with your pharmacist?

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Try some of the gels or sugar-free baby paracetamol. If you are worried and things do not feel right, contact your health visitor or GP.