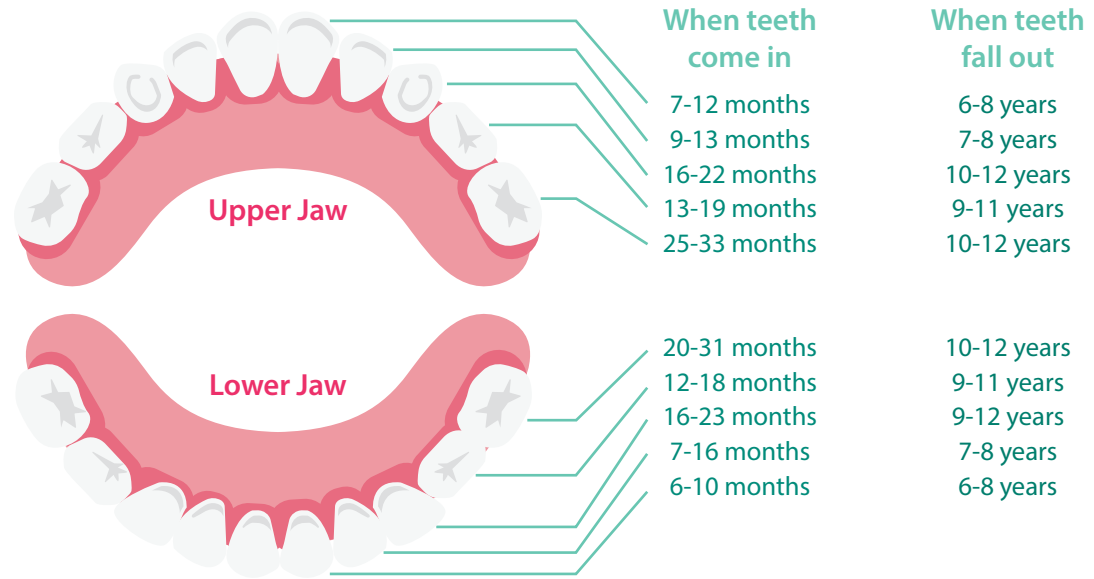


Looking After Your Toddler's Teeth

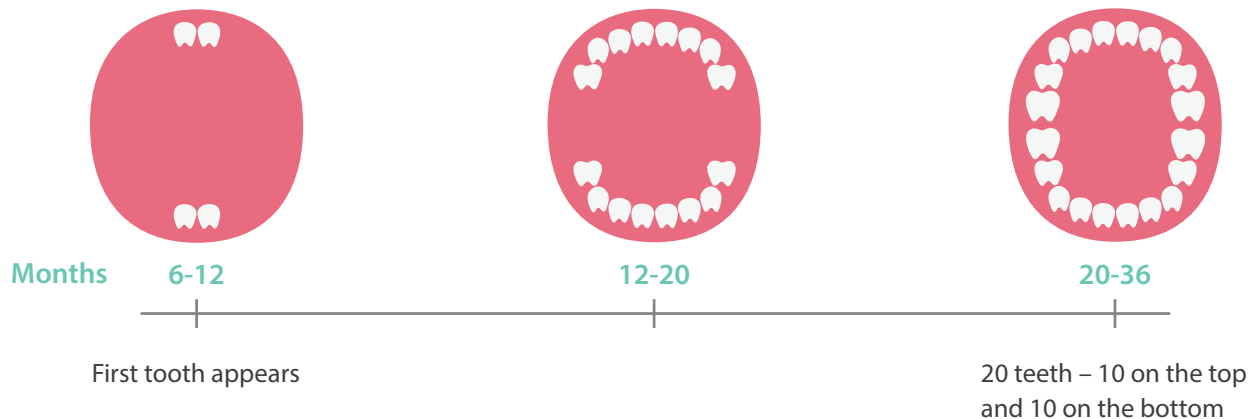
Taking good care of your toddler's first teeth means better health overall. "Baby teeth" are important for:

- eating
- learning to speak
- jaw growth
- helping adult teeth grow in properly

In addition, untreated decay in baby teeth can be painful, spread to adult teeth and cause serious infection in the rest of the body. It can interfere with your child's ability to play, learn, sleep and eat, and lead to poor growth and development. And tooth decay is the main reason young children need day surgery.



How Teeth Usually Grow





DID YOU KNOW

“Baby teeth” aren’t just for babies. The molars at the back of your child’s mouth won’t fall out until he’s about 12 years old.

Teething

Some toddlers aren’t bothered by teething while others are uncomfortable and fussy. Most children will drool.

You can help ease your toddler’s discomfort by:

- ✓ letting him chew on a clean teething ring or wet cloth that’s been chilled in the fridge (not the freezer)
- ✓ wiping and massaging his gums with a clean finger, cloth or toothbrush
- ✓ using a bib to catch drool and wipe his face

Don’t use:

- ✗ teething gels or ointments, which can numb your toddler’s throat and make it hard for him to swallow
- ✗ teething necklaces, which can strangle or choke him
- ✗ food like teething biscuits or frozen fruit, which can lead to tooth decay



DID YOU KNOW

Although teething may be uncomfortable for your toddler, it doesn’t cause fever. If he has a fever, treat it as you normally would (see [When Your Toddler is Sick](#)).

Keeping Teeth Healthy

Brush

Once the first tooth comes in, it’s time to start brushing your toddler’s teeth. Use a soft brush with nylon bristles. (Silicone and rubber bristles don’t remove plaque as well.) And replace the brush often – about every 3 months or after the bristles lose shape, and after your child has been sick.



HOW TO Brush your toddler’s teeth

1. Put a grain-of-rice-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste on a child-sized toothbrush twice each day. Increase to a pea-sized amount at age 3.
2. Have your child lie in your lap, on the change table or on the floor.
3. Brush gently. Sing or chat while brushing.
4. If he’s able (likely by about age 3), let him spit as needed.
5. Put the toothpaste away out of reach.
6. Repeat twice a day – once in the morning and again after the last evening feeding.

Use fluoride

Fluoride makes tooth enamel stronger and better able to fight decay. Check with your health department to see if there’s fluoride in your local water. If not, be doubly sure that your child’s toothpaste includes it. Teach your child to spit the toothpaste out, but don’t worry if he’s not always successful. Even children under 3 can use (and swallow) small amounts of fluoride toothpaste safely.

Floss

Once your toddler’s teeth touch each other, floss them for him once a day. Don’t let him floss his own teeth, because he could damage his gums.

Protect teeth from damage

- ✓ Use the right size car seat, booster seat and seat belt.
- ✗ Don’t let your toddler chew on hard things.
- ✗ Don’t let him walk around with anything in his mouth.
- ✗ Don’t offer your toddler pop or other sugary drinks.
- ✗ Don’t put him down to sleep with a bottle.

Offer healthy food and drinks

- ✓ Offer your child meals and snacks at regular times.
- ✓ Offer milk with meals, and water between meals and with snacks.
- ✓ Limit fruit juice to ½ cup (125 ml) per day.
- ✓ If you offer fruit juice, use it as part of a meal or snack and put it in an open cup to avoid the tooth decay that constant sipping can cause.
- ✓ At 6 months, start helping your child drink from an open cup instead of using a bottle or sip cup.

See [Safe, Healthy Foods and Drinks](#) to learn more.

See the dentist

Your toddler should see a dentist by the time he's 12 months old or within 6 months after his first tooth appears. During this first visit, the dentist will look in your toddler's mouth. It's also a good time to talk about dental care and discuss how often your child should visit.



MONEY SENSE

If you get premium assistance through the Medical Services Plan (MSP) – or if, as of January 2020, you get supplemental services – your child may be eligible for the Healthy Kids program. This can help with the cost of dental care. See [Dental Care, Vision and Hearing](#) in the [Resources](#) chapter for more information.

Don't share germs

Germs from your mouth can lead to tooth decay in your toddler's. Don't put his soother in your mouth, share toothbrushes or spoons, pre-chew his food, or use your teeth to bite pieces in half for him. And keep your own teeth clean and healthy by brushing and flossing daily and visiting the dentist regularly.



BE AWARE

If there are chalky white spots or crescents on your toddler's teeth along the gums that don't brush off, he may have the beginnings of tooth decay. Fluoride can help stop these spots from turning into cavities that need filling. See your dentist, or contact your local public health unit to ask about public dental services.

What About Soothers and Thumb-Sucking?

If your child continues to suck a soother or his thumb after his permanent teeth start to come in, he could be at risk for dental problems, speech problems and ear infections.



HOW TO

Help your toddler use a soother less

- Start when no other big changes are going on in your family.
- Slowly limit soother time until you get it down to 1 use per day – probably naptime or bedtime.
- Once he's asleep, gently remove the soother from his mouth.
- If he wants the soother when he's awake, check if he's hungry, bored, tired or if he needs comfort. Offer a cuddle, a blanket, a toy, breastfeeding or a story instead.
- Praise him for using the soother less, but don't punish him for using it.

Safer soothers

Look for:

- one-piece design
- firmly attached nipple
- no cord (use a clip with a short ribbon instead – but only when your toddler isn't sleeping)
- no toy or stuffed animal attached

Keep it safe by:

- boiling it in water for 5 minutes, then cooling it completely before the first use
- cleaning it regularly in warm, soapy water
- replacing it every 2 months, or sooner if it's sticky, cracked or torn
- replacing it or boiling it for 5 to 10 minutes each day if your child has thrush



BE AWARE

Don't let your toddler chew on a soother for teething. It can break and choke him.



DID YOU KNOW

Cleaning a soother in your own mouth or dipping it in honey or syrup can lead to tooth decay.