

Teething – Top Tips

By Dr. Lin Day (www.babysensory.com)

What, why, how, when and where? Here are some answers to frequently asked questions:



Why does my baby dribble or drool?

Babies usually dribble or drool because their swallowing reflex and tongue movements are immature. Some people believe that dribbling and drooling indicates that babies have started teething. However, the only sure sign is when the emerging teeth can be seen or felt through the gums.

Is chewing a sign of teething?

Babies chew with their gums before they have teeth, but when they start to cut their molar teeth between 10 and 16 months of age, true chewing begins. Before then your baby will chew on just about anything before the first teeth start to emerge.

What are the symptoms of teething?

The gums may appear red and swollen before the emergence of the first tooth. Temporarily pain generally subsides after a few days.

Waking up more frequently at night, daytime restlessness, an increase in finger sucking, ear pulling, drooling, irritability, flushed cheeks and sometimes appetite loss may accompany teething. However these symptoms may also indicate a growth spurt or a bacterial infection, which can occur through the use of teething rings and other things that babies chew on.

If your baby has a temperature, see your GP.

Which teeth appear first?

Tooth buds develop before birth. In fact, some babies may have a tooth at birth or as early as 3 months. Generally, the first tooth appears between 6 and 8 months of age. Premature babies may start teething later than full-term babies.

Evidence suggests that heredity plays a part in teething process. If you were an early or late teether, then your baby could be too.

Teeth generally appear in a certain order. They also tend to make their appearance in pairs (usually one soon after the other), with the bottom 2 central incisors generally arriving before the upper pair. However, some babies may not have their first tooth until they are one-year-old.

The first 4 molars can arrive at any time between 12 - 16 months.

Can I continue to breast feed when my baby has teeth?

If you are both enjoying breastfeeding, continue for as long as you can. If your baby should clamp down on your breast, put her in an upright position.

How can I ease my baby's teething discomfort?

A clean plastic teething ring that has been chilled in the refrigerator can help to relieve discomfort. However, a teething ring that has been frozen could damage your baby's gums if it becomes very hard or cold.

A cool drink of water can help to soothe your baby's gums.

A wet flannel placed on your baby's cheeks can provide comfort and relief from teething.

A gentle gum massage with your index finger or a soft baby toothbrush can provide some relief, but should be discontinued if your baby isn't enjoying it.

A noisy or musical toy can offer a distraction from the discomfort of teething.

Chewing on soft fruit can ease teething discomfort. Your baby should be sitting upright when eating and fully supervised. Hard foods should be avoided under the age of 6 months since babies are unable to swallow properly.

Babies need extra reassurance and plenty of cuddles when they are teething.

How can I look after my baby's teeth?

Take your baby for her first dental visit when the first tooth arrives and floss any teeth that are touching each other.

A soft baby toothbrush can help to keep your baby's gums healthy and her teeth clean.

Fluoride can help prevent tooth decay, but it is important to give the right amount. Too much can damage your baby's developing teeth. Check with your dentist first.

Can I use teething gel?

Teething gels are commonly used to relieve the discomfort of teething, but they may contain harmful substances, which can enter your baby's bloodstream through the gums. Babies are highly sensitive to toxic chemicals due to the immaturity of their immune systems.

Some teething gels contain the preservative phenoxyethanol, which can damage cell DNA and increase the risk of cancer. Phenoxyethanol is stored in the body and it may take several years for its effects to become apparent.

Most teething gels contain the local anaesthetic, benzocaine. Overuse can impair the gag reflex and increase the risk of choking from reflux. Teething gels can be particularly hazardous if used on the gums at night.

Teething gels, which contain aspirin (acetylsalicylic acid), are particularly hazardous. If aspirin is given to babies, it could lead to Reye's syndrome, a disorder characterized by swelling of the brain and liver.

Teething gel must not be given to babies under five months of age. Medication, even natural remedies, may contain preservatives or parabens, which can lead to a number of health problems in later life.

Safety

Regularly clean teething rings, toys or anything else that your baby chews on to prevent the growth of germs. Use a mild antiseptic solution, or hot water and detergent, and rinse items thoroughly before giving them back to your baby.

Carefully inspect toys every time you give them to your baby. If chewing marks are present, check that the toy is not weak or loose.

If your baby likes to bite, avoid squeaky toys that could become dangerous if damaged.

Celebrate

The emergence of your baby's first tooth is a cause for celebration. Most parents cannot get enough of those toothy smiles or photographs to share with friends and family.

In a few short years, you will be celebrating the arrival of the Tooth Fairy!