

Deciduous Teeth

Overview:

- Deciduous teeth are the first set of teeth a person has. They are a total of 20.
- It is important to learn about the teething stage to help make it a less painful and irritating experience for children.
- Most common problems for deciduous teeth: Caries (cavities), pain and infection, thumb sucking and using a pacifier for longer than the average age.
- A child's face and teeth may also be injured, affecting the permanent tooth that would replace the injured primary tooth.
- Care guidelines for children's teeth and mouths should be followed and taken seriously.

What are primary teeth?

They are the first set of teeth a person has and they remain until it is time for them to fall and be replaced by permanent teeth.

Number:

20 teeth

Other names:

Baby teeth, shed teeth, temporary teeth, primary teeth, milk teeth.

Importance of deciduous teeth:

- They help the child chew food.
- They aid speed and enunciation.
- Primary teeth occupy a place in the mouth so they can later allow permanent teeth to appear in their correct place. When a child loses a primary tooth prematurely, this may affect the shape and order of the permanent teeth.
- They help with a child's aesthetic and increase confidence while smiling

When do deciduous teeth appear and when do they shed?

Deciduous teeth start appearing gradually starting the age of 6-7 months, beginning with the lower jaw. They are fully developed at the age of 2.5.

Development of deciduous teeth (teething):

Teething is when a child starts to develop his/her first teeth. This is usually a stressful and tiring time for both parents and baby. Therefore, it's important to have the right information to make this stage in life less painful and irritating for the child.

Symptoms:

- Irritability
- Trouble sleeping
- Stress and discomfort
- Loss of appetite
- More drooling than usual
- Constant need to chew or bite everything the child sees
- Pain
- Swelling and redness in the gum where the tooth appears

When to see a doctor?

In the following cases:

- Fever
- Diarrhea
- Rash

Common problems with primary teeth:

Caries:

They are a bacterial disease caused by the interaction of some bacteria with the sugar in food. This interaction produces acidity that, with time, causes the tooth to decay. Caries are considered the most common dental problem, especially for children.

Caries due to baby bottle:

This one type of early childhood caries. It often starts with the upper front teeth but may affect other teeth.

Causes:

- Teeth are exposed to sugary drinks for a long time. A common example is using the bottle as a way to help children sleep or even as an alternative to the pacifier to calm a stressed baby.
- Bacteria that causes caries can be transmitted through saliva. They can be transmitted from mother to child when food is shared using the same spoon or when the same pacifier or bottle is shared between children.
- The child is not receiving the amount of fluoride it needs to protect against caries.

Prevention:

- Clean the bottle and pacifier as soon as the child is done with them, and keep them away from the reach of children to avoid them being used by another person.
- Avoid sharing the same spoon with a child while eating, especially if the person has caries.
- Clean the child's gum before primary teeth start to appear by using a wet gauze or cloth. Wipe the gum gently after the child has finished drinking milk.
- Start cleaning a child's teeth using a soft toothbrush or a wet gauze. Do this as soon as teething starts and especially after breastfeeding or meals.
- When the child turns one year old, very small amounts of toothpaste (the size of a rice grain) should be used with a toothbrush. This amount should increase until the child turns three so that it is the size of a pea. Make sure the child doesn't swallow any excessive amount of toothpaste by wiping the teeth with a wet gauze if the child can't spit out the paste.
- Avoid using a bottle for any liquid other than milk (e.g. juice or any other sugary drink).
- Make sure the child is done drinking milk because sleeping so the mother can clean his/her teeth.

- Avoid cover the child's pacifier with any product (e.g. honey).
- Encourage the child to use a cup as soon as he/she turns one year old.
- Encourage a child to adopt healthy eating habits (vegetables, fruits, eating at regular times, eating few sweets, etc.)

Pain and infection (abscess):

It is a collection of pus that causes a bacterial infection and inflammation in the root of the tooth.

Causes:

Pus is produced when bacteria invades the dental pulp (the deep part of the tooth that contains blood vessels, nerves and tissues) as a result of ignored dental caries.

Symptoms:

- Severe and constant dental pain that moves to the jawbones or to the neck and ears.
- Sensitive teeth when eating hot or cold foods.
- Sensitive teeth when chewing or biting.
- Fever
- Swelling in the face or cheek.
- Swelling in the lymph nodes under the jaw or in the neck.
- Sudden bad taste and smell in the mouth.

Risk factors:

- Not paying attention to dental hygiene.
- Not treating dental caries.

Complications:

- The pus may spread to the jaw and other parts of the face and neck.
- Neglect may lead to blood poisoning or sepsis, a serious condition that could spread to the rest of the body.

- If the person has a weakened immunity, the risk of infection and its spread may increase.

Prevention:

- Teeth should be cleaned at least every day using a toothpaste containing fluoride.
- A dental floss should be used every day to clean between the teeth.
- Toothbrushes should be changed every three or four months and whenever the brushes are damaged.
- Eat healthy foods, limit your intake of sugary foods, and limit snacking between meals.
- Visit a doctor for regular checkups.

Thumb sucking and using a pacifier for longer than the average age:

Thumb sucking is a natural reaction for children. Sucking their thumbs or other objects they may find makes children feel safe and happy. It is also a way to help a child discover the world around him/her, stay calm, and fall asleep.

Affects of thumb sucking or a pacifier on teeth:

- If a child sucks his/her thumb after developing permanent teeth, this may affect the healthy development of the mouth and the alignment of teeth. It may also affect the shape of the upper jaw.
- A pacifier has the same effect as thumb sucking on the teeth but it is easier to get rid of as a habit.
- This habit affects children's teeth differently based on the intensity with the child sucks the thumb or pacifier. Placing the thumb or pacifier in the mouth without sucking has a milder effect than sucking when it comes to mouth and dental problems. The more intense the sucking, the worse the damage.

When do children stop sucking their thumbs?

They usually stop when their permanent teeth appear. If the habit continues after the permanent teeth appear, consult a doctor.

When to see a doctor?

When you notice any changes or problems with the permanent teeth.

How to help a child get rid of this habit?

- Praise the child and applaud him/her when the habit stops.
- Identify what is making the child stressed or afraid and focus on shifting attention away from them. Children often suck their thumbs when they are stressed or afraid.
- Try to engage the child in choosing the best way to stop the habit when the child is old enough.
- You can ask a dentist for help in explaining why the habit is harmful and what the benefits of stopping it are to encourage the child.
- You can place gloves on the child's hands while he/she sleeps. Remind the child to stop when you see him/her sucking the thumb (avoid embarrassing the child in front of others or speaking loudly).

Reducing pain in the gum and teeth (teething):

- Wipe the drool around the child's face gently using a soft napkin to avoid any redness or rash in that part of the face.
- Pass a small napkin or your finger directly on the child's gum (rub the gum) while making sure that everything that enters the child's mouth is clean.
- Give the child something to chew but make sure that the object is too big to be swallowed to avoid suffocation or fragmentation into small pieces (like a biscuit). For example, you can dampen a clean napkin or cloth and place it in the freezer for 30 minutes or in the fridge for one hour. Take it out before it starts to freeze as this may injure the child's gum, especially if it is swollen. Make sure to wash the cloth well before reusing it or dispose of it after you're done.
- Rubber teethers (hoops) are a good choice to relieve teething pain. However, avoid buying the kind filled with liquid to avoid tearing or leaking.
- When using teethers, it is best to place them in the fridge before using them. Avoid putting them in the freezer and avoid boiling them to disinfect

them. Exposing teethingers to extreme temperatures (hot or cold) can ruin the plastic and cause the inside to leak out.

- Do not use teething biscuits or cold solid foods (like carrots or cucumbers) until the child is old enough to have these foods (at this stage, the baby should be more than 6 months old). You should monitor the child to make sure the foods don't break into small pieces that could cause suffocation.
- If the child is over 6 months old and is very stressed, or having trouble sleeping because of teething, ask your doctor about the possibility of using children's analgesics to reduce the pain. Make sure to stick to the recommended dose.
- Avoid rubbing the child's gum using aspirin or any other product that contains alcohol or fragrance.
- Avoid tying the rubber teether around the child's neck or any other part of the body. They could get stuck in a surrounding object and lead to suffocation or bruises.
- Avoid using amber teething necklaces (that look like beads) as they may expose the child to the risk of suffocation if they wrap around the neck or a piece breaks off and is swallowed.
- Avoid using tablets and materials made of gel for teething without a doctor's prescription as they may not be safe.

Caring for deciduous teeth:

- Several days after childbirth and until the age of 14 months, you can clean the baby's teeth using a wet gauze or cloth. Wipe the gum gently after the baby is done drinking milk, especially when using formula as it increases the chance of caries.
- Take the child to get regular dental checkups as soon as the teeth appear and before the age of 2.
- With the help of parents, children can be taught to use a toothbrush with toothpaste (ages 1 to 3). Teach the child to develop this habit from an early age and until his/her permanent teeth develop.

- At early stages, children may need the help of their parents to brush their teeth for hard to reach area or where the child has poor control.
- Make sure the child doesn't swallow the toothpaste and teach him/her to avoid this.
- Until the child is able to brush his/her teeth correctly and know the amount of toothpaste to use, parents should monitor the child and help brush his/her teeth however long it takes until the child can do it alone.

Injuries to deciduous teeth:

When a child starts to move and discover the world around him/her, the risk of injuries increases (falling, bumping into furniture). These injuries can harm the face or teeth. When primary teeth are injured, this may affect the permanent teeth set to replace the injured tooth. Injuries and accidents may lead to broken teeth, teeth getting implanted in the jaw bone, or teeth partially or fully falling out of place.

To protect the child from such injuries, follow these guidelines:

- Avoid using baby walkers (without seats).
- Avoid using baby rollerblades, skateboards or bicycles of all types without protective gear (helmet, mouth guards, etc.).
- **Teaching children:**
 - Teach children about the important of teeth and paying attention to them while playing. Avoid throwing heavy tools or pushing to reduce the risk of injury to the face, and especially the mouth.
 - Pay attention while playing games and sports (especially for activities that require fast movements like running or jumping) on uneven surfaces, slippery floors, floors with obstacles, or during bad weather conditions (rain, dust).
 - Sit firmly on a swing and don't jump off a swing when it's moving.
 - When coming out of a pool, use the ladder.

Frequently Asked Questions:

- **Is it safe to use a numbing gel or teething tablets?**
It is preferable not to use them for children under 2 years old unless recommended and monitored by a doctor.
- **Does breastfeeding reduce the risk of dental caries?**
Breastfeeding, when it is the only source of nutrition for the baby, can reduce the risk of dental caries because the amount of sugar in a mother's milk is less than that in formula.

Misconceptions:

- **Some parents think that primary teeth are not important because they will be replaced by permanent teeth:**
Truth: Primary teeth are very important for children for the previously mentioned reasons. When primary teeth are shed prematurely, several problems may arise, including:
 - Not enough space is allowed for permanent teeth and braces will later be needed.
 - Delay in the development of permanent teeth.
 - Negative effect on the child's psychological health.
- **Breastfeeding does not cause dental caries.**
Truth: Despite the fact that breastfeeding is very beneficial to a child's health and development when compared with formula, cleaning the child's teeth and mouth is still important even when the child is only having breast milk. The factors that cause caries are many.
- **Using a pacifier causes dental issues:**
Truth: Using a pacifier in an average way the first years of a child's life does not cause long-term dental problems. However, using pacifiers for a long time may lead to problems with teeth alignment or bad dental development.

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For further questions kindly contact us via email:

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