

Not just brushing: 10 ways to start caring for baby teeth

February 6 2023, by Cara Murez



Even the tiniest teeth can decay, which is why it's important to take care

of them.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) offers some tips for caring for those little teeth, starting before the first one even arrives.

"There are habits you can start now to keep your baby's teeth healthy," Dr. David Krol said in an academy news release. "And when that first tooth shows up, there are ways your [pediatrician](#) can keep it healthy, too."

Even before your baby cuts his or her first tooth, start with a routine that includes wiping gums with a clean, damp washcloth or gauze pad after each feeding, the AAP suggests.

Never put your baby to bed with a bottle or give your baby a bottle filled with a sweet drink. Don't dip your baby's pacifier in anything sweet like sugar or honey.

Get your child to a dentist by their first birthday or within six months of their first tooth.

Once that first tooth emerges, start using fluoride toothpaste. Use just a small smear, the size of a rice grain, until age 3.

Graduate to a pea-sized amount of [fluoride toothpaste](#) when your turns 3. Teach your child to spit without rinsing.

Fluoride is a safe and useful cavity-fighting ingredient, the AAP said. It is a natural mineral that has been added to drinking water in some areas since 1945.

Ask your doctor if you should get a prescription for fluoride drops or chewable tablets for your child if you use a private well or your

community water supply doesn't contain fluoride.

Parents should help or supervise tooth brushing until about age 10.

Your pediatrician can do oral health checkups starting at 6 months, including applying a fluoride varnish. AAP recommends a [fluoride](#) varnish every six months until age 5. Some children might need it more often.

All public and private health insurance plans should fully cover this preventive service.

Your child should start using a cup when they reach age 1 year. Skip [sugary drinks](#). Fruit juice, soda and sweetened drinks aren't good for young teeth. Babies under 1 year should not have juice at all, the AAP advised. Limit [older children](#) to 4 ounces per day—half-water/half-juice mixed together.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on [children's oral health](#).

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Citation: Not just brushing: 10 ways to start caring for baby teeth (2023, February 6) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-02-ways-baby-teeth.html>

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