

# A Healthy Mouth for Your Baby



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
National Institutes of Health

*"The Grandfathers  
and the Grandmothers  
are in the children;  
teach them well."*

*- Ojibwe*



# A Healthy Mouth for Your Baby

Healthy teeth are important—even baby teeth. Children need healthy teeth to help them chew and to speak clearly. And baby teeth hold space for adult teeth. This booklet can help you keep your baby's mouth healthy and give him a healthy start!

- 1. Protect your baby's teeth with fluoride.**
- 2. Check and clean your baby's teeth.**
- 3. Feed your baby healthy food.**
- 4. Don't put your baby to bed with a bottle.**
- 5. Take your child to the dentist by age 1.**





Hope and her sister Mary were watching Mary's children play. "What are you doing?" asked Hope.

"I'm cleaning my baby's teeth," said Mary.

"But your baby hardly has any teeth!" said Hope.

"Yes, but the dentist said there are things I can do to keep my baby from getting cavities," said Mary.

"But don't baby teeth just fall out?" asked Hope.

"Yes, but before they fall out baby teeth can decay and cause pain for the baby. And baby teeth are important—they hold space for adult teeth," said Mary.

"The dentist said to clean my baby's teeth as soon as they come in."



"What else did the dentist say?" asked Hope.

"She told me that fluoride protects teeth. She also said to feed my baby healthy foods and not to put my baby to bed with a bottle," said Mary.

"When do you have to start taking care of a baby's teeth?" asked Hope.

"As soon as they come in. Teeth can start to decay as soon as they appear in the mouth," said Mary.

"I'll have to start thinking of those things soon!" said Hope.

# 1 | Protect your Baby's Teeth with Fluoride

Fluoride (said like floor-eyed) protects teeth from tooth decay. It can even heal early decay.

Fluoride is in the drinking water of many communities.

Ask a health care provider if your water has fluoride in it. If it doesn't, ask about other kinds of fluoride (such as fluoride varnish or drops) that can help keep your baby's teeth healthy.



# 2 | Check and Clean Your Baby's Teeth

## Check your baby's teeth

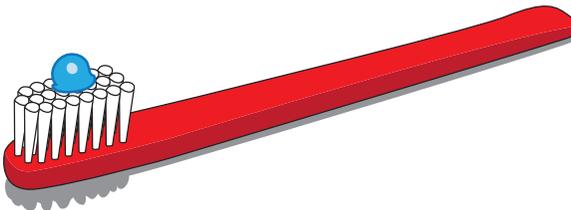
Healthy teeth should be all one color. If you see spots or stains on the teeth, take your baby to a dentist.

## Clean your baby's teeth

Clean them as soon as they come in with a clean, soft cloth or a baby's toothbrush. Clean the teeth at least once a day. It's best to clean them right before bedtime.



At about age 2 (or sooner if a health care provider suggests it) you should start putting fluoride toothpaste on your child's toothbrush. Use only a pea-sized drop of toothpaste about as big as this –



Young children cannot get their teeth clean by themselves. Until they are 7 or 8 years old, you will need to help them brush. Try brushing their teeth first and then letting them finish.

# 3

## Feed Your Baby Healthy Food



- Choose foods without a lot of sugar in them.
- Give your child fruits and vegetables for snacks.
- Save cookies and other treats for special occasions.

# 4

## Don't Put Your Baby to Bed with a Bottle

Milk, formula, juice, and other drinks such as soda all have sugar in them. If sugary liquids stay on your baby's teeth too long, it can lead to tooth decay. (And decayed teeth can cause pain for your baby.)

### What's one of the most important things you can do to keep your baby from getting cavities?

Avoid putting him to bed with a bottle--at night or at nap time. (If you do put your baby to bed with a bottle, fill it only with water.)



### Here are some other things you can do:

- Between feedings, don't give your baby a bottle or sippy cup filled with sweet drinks to carry around.
- Near his first birthday, teach your child to drink from an open cup.
- If your baby uses a pacifier, don't dip it in anything sweet like sugar or honey.



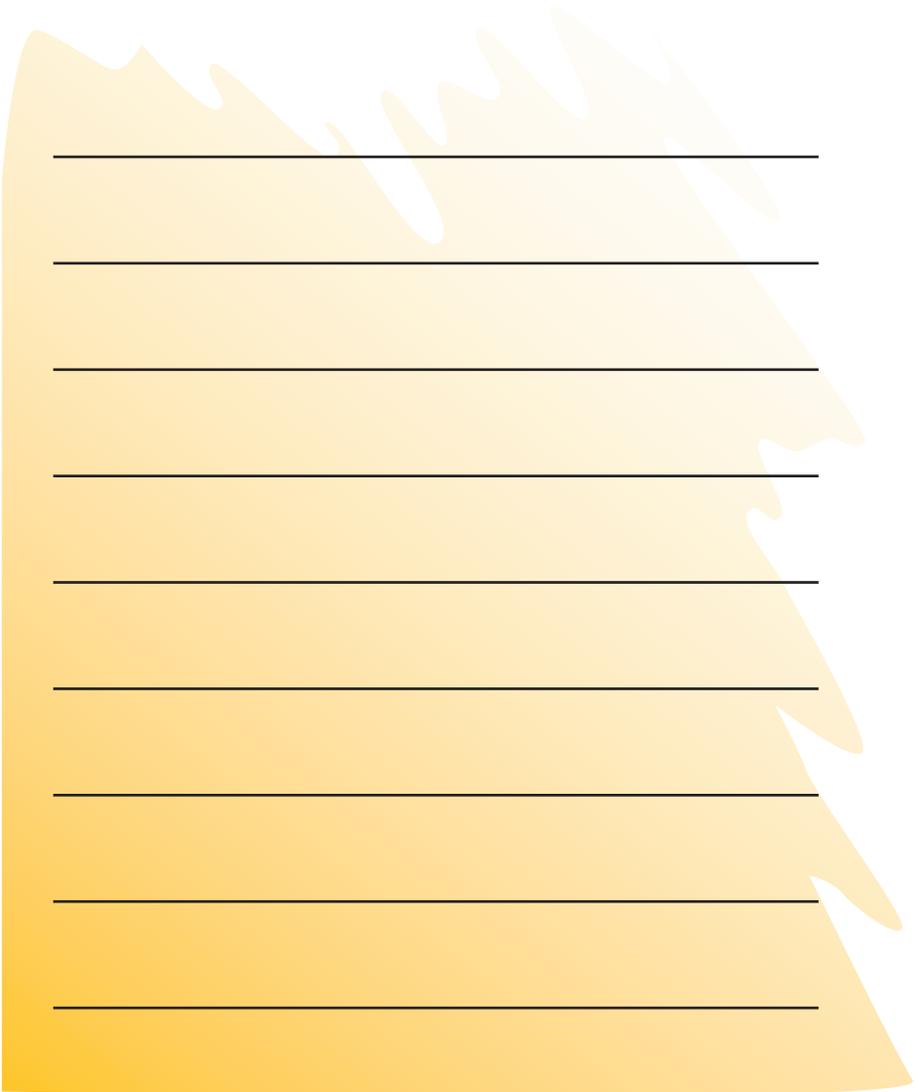
# 5 | Take Your Child to the Dentist

Your child should have a dental visit by his first birthday. At this visit, the dentist will:

- Check your child's teeth.
- Show you the best way to clean your child's teeth.
- Talk to you about other things such as a healthy diet and fluoride that can keep your child's mouth healthy.



**The following  
oral health care  
resources are available  
in your community:**



A yellow notepad graphic with ten horizontal lines for writing. The notepad has a wavy, torn-edge top and a vertical gradient from light yellow at the top to a darker yellow at the bottom. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across most of the width of the notepad.

# Tell us what you think!

Please complete and mail back this postage-paid card.  
Thank you!

Overall, the booklet was:

- Easy to understand     Hard to understand

Please tell us what you like about the booklet:

Please tell us what you dislike or found confusing:

Do you have any questions about tooth decay that were not answered in the booklet?    Yes    No

If yes, what questions?

Is there anything else you'd like to say about the booklet?

Would you recommend the booklet to a friend or family member?    Yes    No

Where did you get this booklet?

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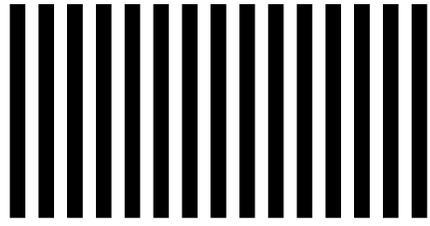
Which best describes you?

- Parent of a young child
- Grandparent, aunt, uncle, or other family member
- Community Health Representative
- Early childhood program staff
- Dentist or dental hygienist
- Physician or nurse
- Other (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)



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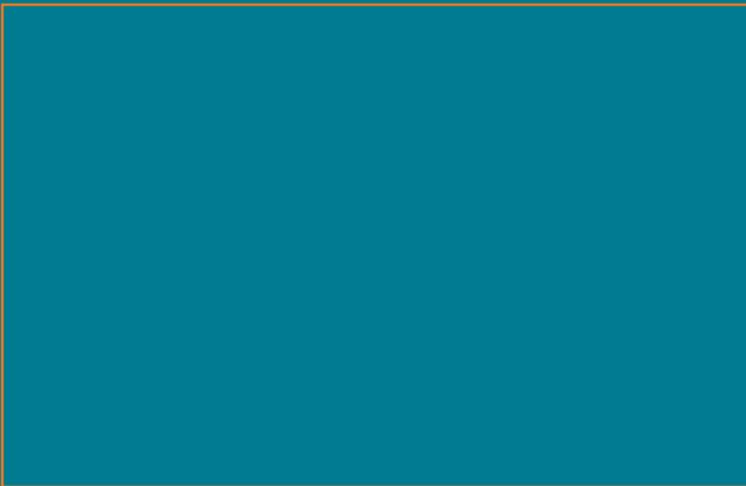


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