



Oral Health and Your Baby

Breastfeeding Bottle Feeding Pacifiers
Teething and the first visit to the dentist
Diet and baby teeth
Oral hygiene
Most frequent oral diseases
Prevention of dental trauma

How to use this booklet

Making the right choices for your baby will affect their teeth for life. This booklet will show you how feeding your baby appropriately and cleaning their teeth properly will set them on the path for healthy teeth throughout childhood, ensuring they can eat, play and learn without pain.

It is recommended that you read all 3 booklets, even if not at once, as together they will provide a comprehensive overview of how best to take care of your young family's teeth.

If you find this booklet helpful, even a small donation to the Global Child Dental Fund will greatly help disadvantaged children all over the world gain access to dental care and wear a healthy smile for life.



global child dental fund www.gcdfund.org



From birth, the dental arches and orofacial structures will start to grow and develop until late adolescence. Maintaining good oral health practices and making regular visits to the dentist as soon as your baby gets their first teeth will allow monitoring of these structures and ensure a healthy smile throughout childhood.

There are some special oral features which can exhibit when your baby is a newborn. These may change or disappear over time. At birth the medical team will examine any features which may hinder or impede proper breathing, sucking, swallowing and feeding.

Breastfeeding

Breast milk is the optimum food for the nutrition and emotional comfort of your baby. This should be a peaceful, bonding moment for both of you, and your baby should be sitting up during this event.

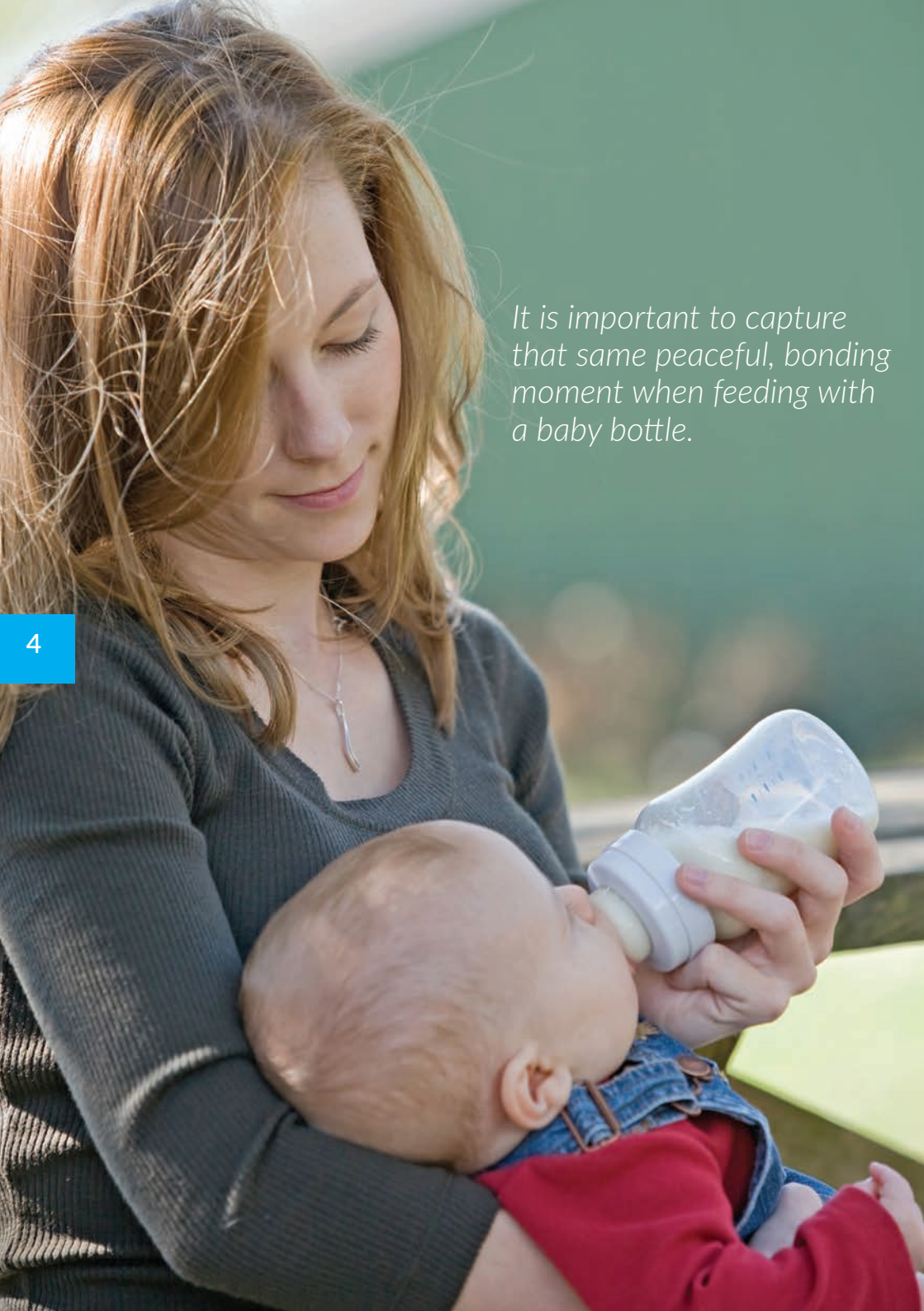


During breast-feeding, your baby will be performing an oral exercise that stimulates all their oral muscles, promoting nasal breathing, speech and development of the dental arches. Thus, it is very important that your baby makes an effort to suck.

For best results, there must be an adequate lip seal around the nipple of the mother, which enables the vacuum required for the output of milk. This will make your baby breathe through the nose and promotes the practice of nasal breathing and correct positioning of the tongue and dental arches.

Bottle Feeding

If your doctor suggests not breastfeeding for maternal health issues, you should be guided by a health professional regarding the selection of baby bottles. It is essential to use a baby bottle with orthodontic nipples; the size of the orthodontic nipple is proportional to the size of your baby's mouth.



It is important to capture that same peaceful, bonding moment when feeding with a baby bottle.

You should not increase the size of the original milk hole because the effort of sucking helps the development of orofacial muscles. You must sterilise the nipples after use.

It is important to capture that same peaceful, bonding moment when feeding with a baby bottle. The time of early weaning and final removal of the bottle should be just the same as for breastfeeding. Baby bottles are just a replacement for the breastfeeding, not a way to make babies drink more milk.

It is important not to leave babies unattended while they are feeding from a bottle. Not only is it dangerous with the possibility of choking, but he/she can also swallow inappropriately.

Prolonged bottle or breastfeeding can cause dental decay; your baby should be weaned onto solid foods at an appropriate age, often around 6 months. Bottle feeding should ideally be stopped by your baby's first birthday.

Pacifiers

Ideally pacifiers should not be used, however if you prefer to use one, it should not be given every time your baby cries. He/she may be crying for another reason, for example because of wet diapers, colic, an uncomfortable position or a simple need for warmth or comfort.

The best time to withdraw a pacifier will depend on the physical and emotional maturity of the infant. This usually occurs at around 2 years of age. Finger sucking usually lasts for a longer period because the baby will have access to their finger all the time.

Any dental arch problems caused by the prolonged use of pacifiers or finger sucking might be solved naturally later on if the habit is stopped by the age of 6-7 years. If not, then the arising dental arch problems would need the help of your dentist to be solved

Teething and the first visit to the dentist

Teething is undoubtedly a difficult time for your baby. Each child will teeth at their own natural time. It is a hereditary process and may alter owing to health or environmental changes.

When your baby gets their first tooth, it is advisable to make an appointment to see the dentist. Even though there may not be much to look at, the dentist will be able to give you extensive diet and oral hygiene advice for your baby, and your baby will get used to being in a dental environment.

Depending on your country, you may see a paediatric dentist. This is a specialized professional who takes care of babies, children and teenagers. Any dentist, however, will promote the development of deciduous and permanent teeth, ensuring they are free of cavities, periodontal disease and dental erosion. Such care will favour the development of your child's dental arches resulting in a balanced bite and an aesthetic and harmonious smile. In complex cases, your dentist may make a referral to other skilled specialists.

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Taking care of your oral health will contribute greatly to your quality of life. Educational and preventative actions during the first years of life require professional care and family commitment. Beginning new healthy habits involve socio-cultural aspects and these are not easy to change.

Diet and baby teeth

Your baby's diet should follow the recommendations of pediatricians. Healthy foods will usually be good for the teeth and overall health of your child. Having a balanced diet, varied and rich in nutrients, is good for the formation of the baby's teeth. It is an excess of processed foods and sugars which may lead to obesity, diabetes or tooth decay.

Sucking is a stimulus for the development of the dental arches and jaw joints (the shape of the mouth and fit of the teeth). This is why breastfeeding is ideal up to 6 months old, and thereafter alternating with other foods until or during the first year of life.



The chewing stage should be introduced gradually by mashing food with a fork and cutting it into pieces. When your baby has 20 baby teeth, he/she should chew all kinds of food (soft and hard) to receive the appropriate learning and stimulus for their mouth and face growth.

To help prevent tooth decay, it is wise to establish a meal schedule creating clear intervals between meals. Fruit juices and chocolate milk should be avoided since they contain both large amounts of sucrose and high acidity, two negative factors for oral health and childhood obesity. Dried fruits such as raisins should be avoided. Babies should always go to sleep with clean teeth. If your baby becomes unwell, it is advised to give them sugar-free medicines wherever possible.

It is very important to start a daily habit of cleaning your baby's mouth.



Oral hygiene in early childhood

It is very important to start a daily habit of cleaning your baby's mouth. You should start brushing as soon as the first baby tooth appears, using brushes appropriate for their age.

After the eruption of the first baby tooth, the oral hygiene of your baby should be carried out as it is for other family members, that is, first thing in the morning and last thing at night, and if possible, after meals. A special brush for the infant is required, ideally with a small head and extra soft bristles. Before teeth arrive, you can clean the gums with a soft cloth.

At bedtime, saliva production is decreased, and it is saliva which naturally protects teeth. This is the time when dental hygiene is needed most.

Use a toothpaste especially suitable for babies as there is a risk that your baby will swallow the toothpaste. The presence of the fluoride from toothpaste in the saliva is very important to prevent cavities. Use a smear of toothpaste only – see picture on next page.

Most baby teeth are spaced out, but if they are too close together, they can be gently flossed if the bristles of the brush cannot reach these areas.

Amount of toothpaste for babies:

Babies only need a minor amount, equivalent to a grain of uncooked rice: 0.01g.



Most frequent oral diseases in early childhood

Babies can get tooth decay and gingivitis; this is usually associated with poor oral hygiene, often when there is a lack of brushing before sleeping either during the day or overnight.

When a cavity is identified, it should be treated immediately. Tooth decay spreads rapidly in baby teeth. When untreated, this can lead to severe pain for your baby and affect their general development and wellbeing.

The occurrence of thrush (candidiasis), is also common. This is caused by fungi. White dots or plates may appear in the infant's mouth, either from adults who kiss them, toys, unsterilized pacifiers and a lack of cleanliness. Good oral hygiene and cleaning the baby's toys help to prevent thrush.

There are other less common changes and pathologies that can appear in the baby's mouth. If you are concerned, your dentist will examine your baby's mouth with care and attention.



Prevention of dental traumas in early childhood

When your baby starts to crawl and walk, they may fall and hit their mouth. Make sure your baby is always accompanied by an adult to help prevent such accidents.

It is essential for your baby to use the safety belt while in a car, stroller or baby seat. Ensure they wear safe shoes with non-slip bottom socks. Watch out for wet floors, steps and furniture corners.

In the event of any trauma to the mouth, your baby should be taken to a dentist immediately. A fall during this period of life may affect the teeth in the mouth and the adult teeth still growing below the gums.

Parents should recall all the relevant details of the fall: where, when and how the trauma took place. This information is important for the professional who will take care of your child. Pay close attention to any cuts inside and outside the mouth, or if your child is dizzy or nauseous. If so, take your baby to a hospital first.

The traumatised area should be washed with water and checked for loose or broken teeth. If there is bleeding, lightly press a clean gauze or piece of cloth on the area. You can also apply ice to minimise swelling. Do not let your baby put their pacifier, baby bottle or toys in the mouth at this time. If they are thirsty, offer water in a cup or spoon.

The dentist may carry out treatment if appropriate, and your child's tooth will be monitored until the replacement of the bruised tooth for its permanent one. What the future holds for the tooth will depend on the intensity of the trauma and the level of the tooth formation at the moment of the mouth trauma.

You can take precautions after the trauma, such as avoiding pacifiers, baby bottles and finger sucking because they may move the tooth, increase bleeding and hinder the recovery of the traumatized area. It is also important to have a liquid-based diet during the first week.

Other booklets in this series:

Oral Health and Your Pregnancy

Visiting the dentist during pregnancy
Common oral health problems in pregnancy
Oral health advice

Oral Health and Your Child

Baby teeth and replacement of teeth
Permanent teeth
Diet and mouth health
Oral hygiene
Most frequent oral diseases
Dental malformation

Series authors (from left to right):

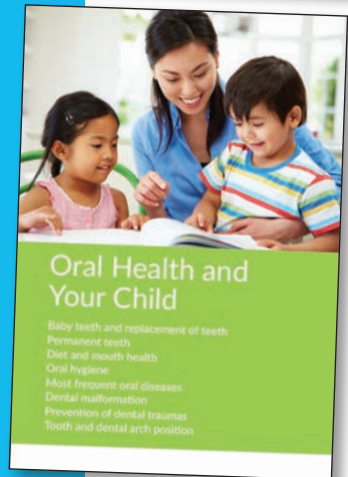
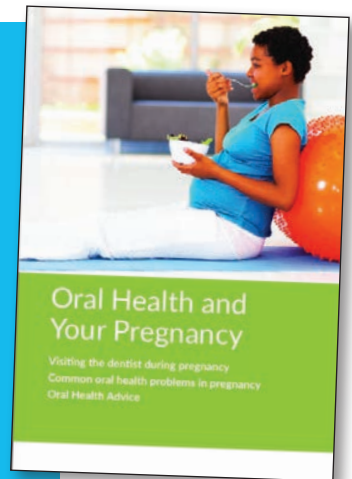


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