



TOOTH OR DARE?

No parent wants to take chances with their child's teeth. But what does good oral hygiene mean, and how do you teach it to your child? Prof Andrew Eder of the London Tooth Wear Centre (www.restorative-dentistry.co.uk) answers some questions on the subject

Coping with teething

Are you and your baby going through teething hell at the moment? Well, did you know that amber may help? Ailish Gray, founder of www.teethingos.com, which sells natural products made from amber, says this natural substance helps ease the pain of new teeth. She first came across amber teething necklaces and bracelets when her own two girls were suffering from teething. Amber is in common usage throughout Europe where it can be purchased in pharmacies. When placed against the skin, amber releases succinite, which works as a natural analgesic and will ease drooling, red cheeks, pain, irritability, nappy rash and wakefulness. Gray found herself recommending them to others regularly and thus the website was born. To see the range, go to www.teethingos.com. She will also be at baby fairs in September and October in Castlebar and Mullingar.



At what age should I start brushing my baby's teeth?

As soon as they come through just wipe them with gauze or a soft ear bud with a small amount of children's toothpaste to remove the plaque and apply a little fluoride to the tooth surfaces. As more teeth come through, switch to a children's toothbrush, still using children's toothpaste until your child is six years old when they can start to spit our properly rather than swallowing the paste.

When should I bring him/her for their first dental appointment?

We encourage children to start coming from about two years old, initially as a fun outing, often sitting on their mum's tummy, simply so they become accustomed to coming along. When children are about three years old, and certainly by the age of five, we try to start polishing the teeth and introducing the hygienist. This helps to instill brushing techniques and a general awareness when young and certainly before the second teeth come through.

What's the correct procedure for teaching my child to brush properly?

See first answer above. When more teeth are through, think about uppers and lowers separately and divide up each jaw into three areas: front, back teeth in right and back teeth in left. For each area, brush the biting surfaces, inside surfaces and outside surfaces. To do this properly, brushing should take a couple of minutes.

At what age can they be trusted to brush their own teeth alone?

This will depend on the maturity of each child but probably from about five or six when they can also spit out on their own.

How often per day should my child brush?

Twice, morning and night, ideally, after breakfast and before bedtime. Avoid brushing straight after having acidic foods and drinks such as fruit as this can soften the outermost tooth enamel.

When should my child use toothpaste? Is there any particular type they should use?

Use children's toothpaste up until they are aged between six and eight, when they can spit out normally. They only need a pea-sized amount of toothpaste.

Does a child need to floss or use mouthwash?

This is not necessary for most children but flossing should be introduced once the second teeth come through and are in direct contact with adjacent teeth. Some children do develop a high decay rate and children's fluoride rinses are available. Regular flossing here, even with baby teeth, would be helpful to remove soft food deposits from between the teeth.

What foods/drinks should I avoid giving my child?

Try to avoid sweet or acidic drinks (ie sparkling drinks and fruit juices) as the sugars and acids can cause tooth decay and enamel erosion.

Is it true that fruit can cause tooth decay? Why is this?

Yes and no. Fruit per se does not cause decay. Fruit, however, is acidic and damages the enamel. This can then allow conventional tooth decay to develop more easily and more rapidly.

Are there any signs or symptoms I need to watch out for in terms of my child's oral health, such as abscesses and sensitivity?

Dental decay is normally identified when teeth become discoloured or sensitive. Front teeth can also become discoloured if they develop an abscess, perhaps after being knocked. So, watch out for any colour changes, sensitivity, swellings on the gum or tenderness when pressing a tooth.

What should I do if my child is afraid of going to the dentist?

See the second answer above. We try to avoid this through acclimatisation from a very young age. Careful acclimatisation is essential to avoid developing fear and a phobia for the rest of one's life.

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