

Breaking through to a new smile

What happens when your baby is teething?

At some point, usually between 4 to 7 months of age, your baby will begin teething. For many children, this process can last up to three years, allowing time for a set of 20 teeth to push through the gums (or erupt).

HOW WILL I KNOW WHEN MY BABY STARTS TEETHING?

Here are some signs that your child is getting a new tooth:

- Your baby may become very fussy.
- He or she may have trouble falling asleep.
- He or she might not want to eat.
- Your baby might start to drool more than usual.

HOW CAN I MAKE MY BABY MORE COMFORTABLE?

Fussiness. Sleeplessness. Refusing to eat. These behaviors can result from sore and tender gums. Try soothing the gums by rubbing them gently with a clean finger; a moist gauze; or a small, cool spoon. Letting your child chew on a clean teething ring also may relieve some of the discomfort he or she is feeling.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration¹ (FDA) has issued a warning about the use of numbing gels. Several teething gels are available for purchase without a prescription. Many of these gels rely on benzocaine to numb the gums (check the product label), which the FDA warns against using. Unless a health care professional is overseeing the use of these gels, the FDA recommends that parents of children younger than 2 years not use medications that contain benzocaine. The FDA has received reports of a “rare but serious—and sometimes fatal—condition called methemoglobinemia, a disorder in which the amount of oxygen carried through the bloodstream is greatly reduced.”¹ Symptoms of methemoglobinemia can occur within minutes to hours after use of benzocaine and include the following²:

- pale, gray or blue-colored skin, lips and nail beds;
- shortness of breath;
- fatigue;

- confusion;
- headache;
- lightheadedness;
- rapid heart rate.

If you suspect your child is suffering from methemoglobinemia, take him or her to the nearest hospital emergency department immediately.

In 2014, the FDA also warned parents and caregivers not to use oral viscous lidocaine, a prescription medication, to treat teething pain.¹ An overdose of viscous lidocaine can result in seizures, severe brain injury and problems with the heart.

VISIT THE DENTIST

As soon as your baby gets that first tooth (or by his or her first birthday), schedule a well-baby visit with the dentist. This visit allows your dentist to check for signs of tooth decay and to talk with you about habits and conditions that can affect your child’s teeth. Your dentist also can show you the proper way to brush your child’s teeth and care for that brand new smile. ■

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“For the Patient” provides general information on dental treatments to dental patients. It is designed to prompt discussion between dentist and patient about treatment options and does not substitute for the dentist’s professional assessment based on the individual patient’s needs and desires.

1. U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Do teething babies need medicine on their gums? No. www.fda.gov/forconsumers/consumerupdates/ucm385817.htm. Accessed Sept. 17, 2014.

2. U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Benzocaine and babies: not a good mix. www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm306062.htm. Accessed Sept. 17, 2014.