

The Tooth Fairy and Other Teething Myths...

Babies begin teething months before the first tooth appears. All babies and young children are teething to help push developing teeth through their gums. The first tooth is usually one of the middle lower ones. Most often it erupts around age six months but could appear anytime between 3 and 18 months of age. Your child will have a complete set of 20 baby teeth by age three. (Adults have 32 permanent teeth.)

Parents, grandmothers, even medical professionals, seems like everyone has a list of symptoms they believe are caused by teething. Remember that during this period of an infant's life, protection from mother's antibodies drops. They are exposed to many childhood illnesses. So teething is often blamed for symptoms such as: *changes in sleep, eating patterns, runny nose, drooling, rash, diarrhea*. A convincing number of studies have shown that teething is *not* the cause of fever or any of these symptoms. (If you go for a dental cleaning, do you get fever afterwards?)

So how can we ease the discomfort of a teething baby or toddler?

Many teething remedies have been used over time. Parents should not use medicated gels with *lidocaine* to treat teething pain. The *FDA (Food and Drug Administration)* warns that *lidocaine* can be harmful. Seizures, brain injury, heart problems and death could occur!

The *FDA* is also warning parents and caregivers not to use benzocaine products either. *Benzocaine*, a local anesthetic, is the active ingredient in OTC products such as *Anbesol, Baby Orajel/Orajel, Cepacol, Chloraseptic* to name a few. Benzocaine doesn't work well anyway because it washes out of a baby's mouth within minutes. *Benzocaine* can lead to a serious condition that stops red blood cells carrying oxygen (*methemoglobinemia*)!

What can I use then?

Try giving your child something that's cool to touch but tough to chew on: a wet washcloth chilled in the freezer, a frozen banana, a frozen bagel if you've introduced solids. Chilled teething rings can work well (use solid type, not liquid filled). Take these out of the freezer before they are rock hard (about 15 to 30 minutes)! Occasionally your finger, or a "lovey"-type toy make help as well.

Start Brushing as the first tooth breaks through:

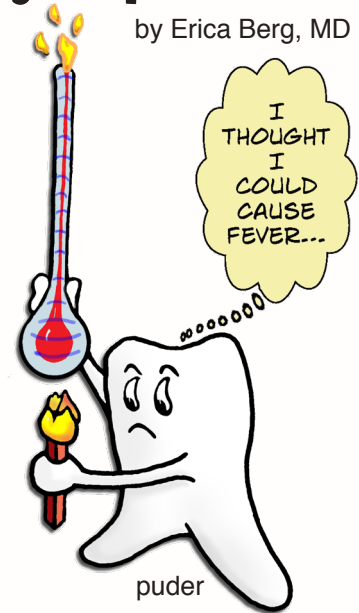
Brush twice a day with a soft child's toothbrush. Use children's fluoride toothpaste, about the size of a grain of rice on the brush. No bottles after bedtime brushing until morning!

To prevent cavities, never let your baby fall asleep with a bottle, *not* at nap time and *not* at night. This will keep milk from pooling around the teeth and creating a breeding ground for decay. Bottle rot of a baby's teeth can be awful! Your baby's teeth and gums will be examined at well-baby checkups. A first dental exam is recommended between ages one and two.

About that tooth fairy myth, all I know is:

Mysteriously, when a child's tooth is put under their pillow it is gone the next morning. Often some money is there instead, just sayin'. (My dad got a nickel.)

by Erica Berg, MD



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