



# Dental Care for Babies and Toddlers

## How will my child's teeth develop?

Your baby's first teeth started to form whilst you were pregnant. They often begin to appear around 6 months of age, but it can be as late as 1 year when the first tooth appears. By about 3 years of age children usually have 20 healthy baby teeth.

Children with a cleft that only affects the palate may develop normal teeth but sometimes they may look slightly crooked.

If the cleft affects the lip/gum there may be a missing or extra tooth near the cleft. (Fig 1) Teeth in this area may look uneven. One or two teeth next to the cleft may look slightly different in colour, if the enamel has not formed properly. This is called hypoplasia, which is not a problem, but these teeth could decay more easily. (Fig 2)



**Fig 1**



**Fig 2**

## Why is it important to look after my baby's teeth?

- To have a healthy happy smile.
- To develop good lifetime habits for a healthy mouth.
- To help your baby chew, enjoy food and grow well.
- To help your baby's speech.
- To avoid dental decay, toothache and unwanted dental treatment.

## What can I do to look after my child's teeth?

### Drinks and Diet

When teeth first appear they are healthy. Dental decay can develop as soon as teeth come through. Such early decay is usually caused by frequent drinking of milk or juice between meals. Tap water is the best alternative to milk.

To prevent your baby's teeth decaying:

- Introduce a Doidy cup (see **Fig 3**) or free-flowing feeder cup rather than a non-spill cup when weaning begins.
- Offer cooled boiled tap water if your baby is thirsty between meals or during the night.
- Please try to avoid juices (including baby juices, flavoured waters and fizzy drinks).
- Fresh fruit juice (diluted 1 part juice to 10 parts water) can be given at mealtimes from 6 months of age. Please don't offer this between meals. Fresh fruit juice is acidic and contains natural fruit sugars which can decay teeth if given frequently.
- If offering juice, this should always be from a free-flowing cup and never in a bottle, as it increases the risk of dental decay.

- Aim to stop bottle feeding (especially during the night) by the time your child is one year old.
- Extra sugar is not needed for weaning foods.
- If you want to give your child sweet foods and drinks it is much safer for teeth to have them as a pudding after a meal.
- We all like to give our children treats, so offering sweets or chocolate after meals rather than in between and before meals, reduces the risk of damaging your child's teeth.
- If you give between-meal snacks, choose low sugar foods, e.g. breadsticks, pitta or chapatti, rice cakes, unsweetened yoghurt, chopped fruit or vegetables, or a small cube of cheese.
- Please ensure that all family members, child minders or nursery staff, friends and anyone else involved with your child is aware of the importance of looking after your child's teeth.
- Please use sugar-free medicines whenever possible.



Fig 3 Child using a Doidy cup

## Tooth brushing

- Children who have their teeth brushed by their parents or carers have healthier teeth.
- Please develop the routine of brushing your child's teeth twice a day as soon as they appear. The fluoride in the toothpaste will help to protect your child's teeth from dental decay.
- Use a small headed baby toothbrush and a smear of adult toothpaste to clean all the teeth and gums. You can use a pea sized amount of toothpaste for toddlers from 3 years old.
- The toothpaste should contain at least 1350 to 1500 parts per million fluoride. This is written on the tube of toothpaste for example "*sodium fluoride 1450ppm*".
- If you live in an area with fluoridated water please discuss the use of toothpaste with your dentist or cleft team.
- Any slightly discoloured or crooked teeth in the cleft area will need extra careful cleaning.
- If the cleft affects the lip or gum, finish by smearing toothpaste onto the teeth in the area of the cleft.
- Please encourage your child to spit out the excess toothpaste when able to do this. Try not to rinse with water after brushing.
- Your dentist and the cleft team can show you the best way to brush your child's teeth.
- Your dentist can also offer help with tooth-brushing advice.



## Visiting a dentist

Please register your child with a local dentist before the age of one year. With regular dental visits:

- Your child will become relaxed and happy when visiting a dentist.
- The dentist can offer advice about your child's general dental care.
- Sometimes a fluoride varnish is used to strengthen teeth in the cleft area.
- Very occasionally the dentist may prescribe fluoride drops/tablets. If using these, adult toothpaste should not be used to avoid excess fluoride. Please discuss this with your dentist.

**Fig 5** Child receiving a dental examination



## Where can I get help?

If you experience problems registering your child with a local dentist you can:

- Visit [www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk) for a dentist in your area.
- Contact your health visitor who can refer you to your local Community Dental Clinic.
- Contact your Cleft Lip and Palate Unit.

## Suggestions/Comments

The staff are here to help and it is important for them to know if you have any comments or suggestions about the services you have received. If you wish to speak to a member of the cleft team please telephone us:

Liverpool: 0151 252 5209

Manchester: 0161 701 9007

Monday to Friday, 9.00 am to 5.00 pm

Alternatively you can contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on:

Manchester 0161 701 8700,

Monday to Friday 9.00 am to 4.00 pm,

e-mail [childrens.pals@cmft.nhs.uk](mailto:childrens.pals@cmft.nhs.uk)

Liverpool 0151 252 5374/5161,

Monday to Friday 9.00 am to 4.30 pm,

e-mail [PALS@alderhey.nhs.uk](mailto:PALS@alderhey.nhs.uk)

## External contacts and information

### **Cleft Lip and Palate Association (CLAPA)**

First Floor,  
Green Man Tower,  
332b Goswell Rd,  
London EC1V 7LQ  
Tel: 0207 833 4883 • Fax 020 7833 5999  
E-mail: [info@clapa.com](mailto:info@clapa.com)  
web: [www.clapa.com](http://www.clapa.com)

### **Changing Faces**

The Squire Centre,  
33-37 University Street,  
London, WC1E 6JN  
Tel: 0845 4500 275 • Fax 0845 4500 276  
E-mail: [info@changingfaces.org.uk](mailto:info@changingfaces.org.uk)  
web: [www.changingfaces.org.uk](http://www.changingfaces.org.uk)

Information leaflets about our service are available to download from both Alder Hey Children's Hospital and Royal Manchester Children's Hospital websites:

[www.alderhey.com/services/cleftpalate.asp](http://www.alderhey.com/services/cleftpalate.asp)  
[www.cmft.nhs.uk/childrens-hospitals/our-services/cleft-lip-and-palate.aspx](http://www.cmft.nhs.uk/childrens-hospitals/our-services/cleft-lip-and-palate.aspx)

This information is available in Welsh, if preferred.  
Mae'r wybodaeth hon ar gael yn Gymraeg,  
pe baech yn dymuno hynny.