

Your Child's Teeth

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TEETH BEGUN LONG BEFORE BIRTH

The mother's responsibility for the teeth of her child begins long before he is born. As early as the third month of pregnancy, tooth development starts, and at birth the first teeth are fully formed in the jaw. The quality of these teeth, therefore, is almost entirely determined during the prenatal period.

Early visits to both doctor and dentist with reexaminations as often as advised are safeguards which no expectant mother can afford to neglect. Her diet during this time influences to a great extent the condition of the baby's teeth. As a result of food deficiencies, changes take place which interfere with normal development, the longer the diet continuing inadequate the more serious the consequences. Destruction may go on in the section of the tooth in which the blood vessels and nerves are found. The enamel may become soft and chalky. The teeth which later appear are likely to be poor in form, easily worn down, and much more susceptible to decay than those which are supplied through the mother's food with essentials for normal growth. Improvement in the diet may be followed by some improvement in tooth structure, but throughout pregnancy the mother needs to give careful consideration to her eating habits.

DIET IN PREGNANCY

The foods which will protect the mother's teeth against the heavy demands of pregnancy make up the very diet to supply materials for the bones and teeth of the child. Unless the doctor has given special directions her diet should include the following daily:

Milk: 1 pint to 1 quart. Without at least 1 pint of milk, enough calcium or lime can not be supplied for the bones and teeth of the baby and for the maintenance of the mother's own teeth.

Green leafy vegetables: Spinach, kale, Swiss chard, lettuce, cabbage, escarole, etc.

Other vegetables: At least two. Most vegetables can best be cooked in 10 to 25 minutes. A raw vegetable or canned tomato should be included daily.

Fruit, fresh if possible. Oranges and grapefruit are good.

Whole-grain cereal or bread: At least one serving.

BREAST FEEDING HELPS BUILD BABY'S TEETH

These foods also help to prepare the mother for successful breast feeding, her next responsibility. Since the development of the permanent teeth begins shortly after birth, the diet during the early months of the baby's life affects materially the health of these teeth. In the great majority of cases no other food approaches in value the mother's milk during the baby's first nine months. The breast-fed baby develops a vigor and resistance to disease several times greater than that of the bottle-fed child. He also strengthens the muscles of his jaw and throat and widens his dental arch, preparing the way for well-spaced, regular teeth. A carefully chosen diet similar in kind but greater in amount than that in pregnancy is an essential in the successful production of milk of good quality. Milk and raw fruits and vegetables should be eaten daily. The nursing mother can provide *only* through her own food the elements necessary for the baby.

ADDITIONAL FOODS FOR THE BABY

Vital as is milk for the child, it alone can not supply all that is needed for the growing body and growing teeth. During the first year the following foods should be added to the diet:

At 2 or 3 weeks vitamin-tested cod-liver oil, beginning with $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoonful twice daily, increasing until at the end of the third month $1\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoonfuls are given twice daily.

At the end of the first month, twice daily, 1 teaspoonful of strained orange juice in an equal amount of cool boiled water or $\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoonful of strained tomato juice (without water), gradually increased to 1 tablespoonful of orange juice or 2 tablespoonfuls of tomato juice twice a day by the third month.

At the beginning of the fifth month a well-cooked, whole-grain cereal daily.

In the fifth month, egg yolk—a very small amount, gradually increased to a whole yolk daily.

In the sixth month, 1 teaspoonful of strained green vegetables, gradually increased to 3 tablespoonfuls by the ninth month.

In the tenth month, apple sauce or prune pulp, strained, once a day.

In the eleventh month, baked white potatoes, 2 tablespoonfuls three or four times a week.

As soon as the first tooth appears, some food which needs chewing, such as a small piece of unsweetened zwieback or toast, should be given each day.

DIET IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

Throughout the early years milk, fruits, and vegetables must form the basis of the diet. Usually the child should have $1\frac{1}{2}$ pints of milk a day, used either in cooking or as a drink. He needs two servings of fruit, one fresh, preferably an orange. He should have at least two vegetables besides potato each day, with greens three or four times a week. Raw cabbage, lettuce, celery, and carrots, put through the meat chopper or cut very fine, may be given most children as soon as all their first teeth have erupted. Tomatoes, fresh or canned, should be eaten often. An egg daily or four or five times a week is advisable. Coarse cereals and dark breads should be used. One small serving of meat or fish daily may be given. Regularity of meals is of the greatest value. Candy is dangerous because it spoils the appetite for foods which build and protect the teeth.

GENERAL HEALTH AND DENTAL HEALTH

During the first few years there is special susceptibility to those diseases accompanied by high temperature, such as measles, diphtheria, scarlet fever, and others. For this reason advantage should be taken of such protection as is given by injections against diphtheria and smallpox vaccination. Regular, complete examinations by the doctor, which help to keep the well child well, are a great aid to dental health.

Teeth which are straight, regular, and in the right relation to one another are easy to keep clean, attractive in appearance, and essential to good mastication. A well-formed dental arch is necessary for such teeth. After birth, the development of the face and jaw normally takes place rapidly, a wide arch forming with good proportions between the skull and face. The first teeth begin to come out at about 6 years to make room for the second set.

It is of great importance to dental welfare as well as to general bodily health that a child breathe easily and naturally through the nose. Adenoids, which force mouth breathing, often cause deformities of the arch, with crowded, irregular teeth as the result. Other causes are such habits as thumb or finger sucking, the use of the pacifier or teething ring, and continual pressure of the hand against the cheek while the baby is asleep. Good nutrition during the early years, obtained through breast feeding followed by an adequate diet with hard foods for exercise, is probably the greatest aid to normal arch expansion. The dentist should see the child often enough so that he may undertake the early treatment to widen an arch which is not developing naturally.

FREQUENT EXAMINATIONS BY THE DENTIST

Frequent visits to the dentist—once every six months—should be the experience of every child. Care of the first teeth is fully as important as care of the second for the following reasons: (1) Too early loss of primary teeth interferes with the growth of the jaw, causing irregularity of the secondary teeth; (2) infected first teeth may cause injury to the second teeth in formation in the jaw; (3) only when the first teeth are well cared for does the baby learn to chew his food long and thoroughly.

The baby's earliest visit to the dentist should take place as soon as the primary teeth have all erupted. They should be examined for fissures, tiny imperfections which may have formed in the enamel of the developing tooth and which only the dentist can find. If these fissures are properly treated, decay is prevented. Return visits should be made every six months for examination and cleaning until the permanent teeth begin to erupt. Each pair of teeth should be examined as soon as it appears. Imperfections in both the first and the second teeth must be treated *at once* if the teeth are to be kept sound.

THE SIXTH-YEAR MOLAR

When the child is from 5 to 7 years old, there comes in both upper and lower jaws an important tooth, often called the keystone of the dental arch. This is the sixth-year molar, the sixth tooth from the front on each side and the first permanent tooth. Upon its preservation and care depends to a great extent the regularity of all the second teeth. As soon as the chewing surface has erupted it should be examined for defects by the dentist.

HELPING THE TEETH TO RESIST DECAY

It is probable that there is some circulation in the teeth as in other tissues of the body. This suggests that resistance to decay in an erupted tooth can be increased by an improvement in diet and health habits, even though such conditions as irregularity and the presence of fissures can not be affected by these factors.

As the baby's first teeth appear, brush them after each meal with a small, soft brush, cleaning the upper gums and teeth with a downward motion and the lower ones with an upward motion. Brush the inner as well as the outer surfaces. A mild tooth paste or powder may be used but is not necessary. The brush should be kept where it can be reached by air and sunshine and should be frequently replaced. Reasonable home care of the mouth is important, but even hourly brushing can not keep from decay teeth which are soft, poorly formed, and irregularly placed. The healthy mouth tends to stay clean.

HEALTHY GUMS THE RESULT OF PROPER DIET

The child's gums should be firm, dense, a clear light pink in color, and should hold the teeth firmly in place. Any sign of a gum boil should be regarded as a danger signal. The diet apparently not only affects the teeth directly but also has considerable influence upon the soft tissues of the mouth. There seems to be a definite relation between the condition of the intestines and that of the gums. When the intestine does not function properly the mouth is unhealthy and dirty. A bulky diet, then, in which raw fruits and vegetables are prominent is an aid in providing the best environment for the teeth.

THE TEETH A VITAL PART OF THE BODY

The teeth are assuredly not a unit in themselves, unrelated to the rest of the body, but are a vital part of the whole, affected by whatever affects the body as a whole. A heredity, environment, and diet which produce bones of poor quality, flabby muscles, and low resistance to infection of all kinds invariably show their effects in the teeth. On the other hand, in the child in good physical condition we may expect to find sound teeth as well as bones of fine, firm texture. The healthy mouth reflects the healthy body.

The body may be pictured as guarded at its entrance by a threshold, with all the ills of childhood outside the door waiting to slip over the threshold if it is lowered but unable to get in while it is kept high. Retarded growth of the arch, decay of the teeth, and other unhealthy mouth conditions are among the signs that the threshold has been lowered. Medical supervision, an adequate diet, sunshine, sleep, exercise, and a happy environment will keep the protecting threshold so high that, with the help of the dentist, sound teeth may result.

UNHEALTHY TEETH INVITE DECAY

HEALTHY TEETH RESIST IT



For detailed discussion of diet and sunlight for expectant mothers, babies, and children of the preschool age see the Children's Bureau publications Prenatal Care, Infant Care, and Child Care.

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