



Brush Up on Oral Health

March 2019

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Did You Know?

- **Typically, the two bottom front teeth come into the baby's mouth first, followed by the two top front teeth a few weeks later.**
- **By the time a child is 3 years old, they will have 20 primary (baby) teeth.**



Babies Who Are Teething

Teething happens when a baby's primary teeth push through the gums into the baby's mouth. For some babies, teething is uncomfortable. Head Start staff can support parents whose baby is teething.

This issue of *Brush Up on Oral Health* provides information on teething and offers tips for Head Start staff to share with parents to comfort their baby who has teething pain. A recipe for a healthy snack that can be made in the Head Start classroom or at home is also included.

Teething Basics

Most babies begin teething around age 6 months. But teething can start any time between ages 3 and 12 months. As the primary teeth come into the mouth, babies may feel pain from the tooth pushing through the gum. Babies who are teething may become cranky, drool more, have red and swollen spots on their gums, and chew on things more frequently.

Tips for Parents to Ease Baby's Teething Pain

- **Keep it safe.** Here are some ideas for choosing safe teething toys.
 - Avoid liquid-filled teething toys. The baby may chew a hole into them.
 - Find teething toys that are made of a single piece of durable material. Otherwise, loose pieces could break off in the baby's mouth and cause choking.
 - Don't hang teething toys on a cord around a baby's neck or attach them to clothes. They could get tangled around the baby's neck and cause choking. These toys include chew beads, chew necklaces, or pacifiers.

- **Clean it.** Many strategies for comforting a teething baby include putting something in the baby's mouth. Everything that goes in the mouth should be cleaned first to keep the baby healthy. Read the package for directions on how to clean the item. Some items are dishwasher safe and some are not.
- **Massage it.** Gently rub the baby's gums with a clean finger for about two minutes. Many babies find the pressure soothing. For babies who already have some teeth, be careful the baby doesn't bite you!
- **Cool it.** Cold helps ease the pain of sore gums. Give the baby a cool clean wet washcloth, spoon, pacifier, or teething ring to chew on. Teething rings can be put in the refrigerator but not the freezer. Chewing frozen teething rings can make a baby's cheeks or chin become bumpy and turn reddish-purple. Note: To prevent injuries to the mouth, do not let a baby walk while holding a spoon.
- **Freeze it.** Some frozen foods can help ease teething pain. See Cook's Corner for two examples.
- **Don't use it.** Over-the-counter teething gels and liquids on babies' gums are not recommended because they offer little to no benefit for treating oral pain. They all contain benzocaine, which if used incorrectly can cause serious health problems, including blood disorders and death. If nothing works to ease a baby's teething pain, ask the baby's doctor or dentist for directions on what pain medications can be used and how to use them safely.



In addition to the suggestions given above, the American Academy of Pediatrics has [information and tips](#) that can help parents comfort a baby who is teething (available in print and audio format in English and Spanish).

It is important to remember that once a tooth comes into the mouth, the tooth is at risk for developing tooth decay. Encourage parents to brush their child's teeth using an infant-sized toothbrush with soft bristles with a smear (rice-size amount) of fluoride in the morning and before bedtime.

Cook's Corner: Snacks to Ease Teething Pain

Here is a delicious healthy snack that can be given to babies who are teething.

(Note: Bananas and bagels contain sugar that can cause tooth decay. Give these foods to teething babies once in a while and not throughout the day.)

Ingredients

- 1 banana or plain bagel

Directions

1. If using a banana, peel it and cut into 6 pieces. If using a bagel, cut bagel halves into quarters.
2. Place the banana or bagel pieces on a cookie sheet.



3. Put the sheet in the freezer for 20–30 minutes or until the banana or bagel pieces are frozen.
4. Place the frozen banana or bagel pieces in a plastic freezer bag or container. Frozen bananas and bagel pieces can be stored for up to 4 months.
5. Comfort the teething baby with one frozen banana or bagel piece.

Safety tip: Offer the food while the baby is sitting in a high chair.

Contact Us

The National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness welcomes your feedback on this issue, as well as your suggestions for topics for future issues. Please forward your comments to health@ecetta.info or call 866-763-6481.

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