

The Little Teeth Book

**An oral health
resource for
Maternal and
Child Health
Nurses**



dental health
services victoria
oral health for better health

Acknowledgements

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Disclaimer

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Introduction

This resource is for each MCH service point, and not for distribution to clients.

The Little Teeth Book is designed to support MCH nurses to talk about oral health with families. It provides simple messages and tips for nurses to share with parents. For detailed information nurses should refer to the manual *Teeth: Oral Health Information for Maternal & Child Health Nurses*.

The book complements Tooth Tips provided to parents in the key ages and stages packs at the eight, 12 and 18 months visits.

The Little Teeth Book can also be downloaded from the DHSV web site www.dhsv.org.au. Look for the professionals tab and click on MCH Nurses.



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Baby teeth are important

Healthy baby teeth are important for:

- Eating, biting, chewing and grinding foods when babies start to eat.
- Development of normal speech.
- Making space for permanent teeth and guiding them into the correct position.
- Developing jaw and mouth muscles.
- Self-esteem.
- Learning.



Teething

Common signs can include irritability, increased dribbling, red cheeks and swelling of gums. Fever (above 38°C) and diarrhoea are not signs of teething, so seek medical advice.

When teeth might appear

				
6–12 months	9–16 months	13–18 months	16–23 months	23–33 months
				
				<p>By 3½ years your child should have 20 baby teeth.</p>

Remember the times and order may vary

Looking after baby teeth is important for adult teeth

Adult teeth start forming in the baby during pregnancy and continue to develop inside baby's jawbones after birth. What happens to baby teeth can affect the adult teeth.



Milk and water are the best drinks for children

Under 12 months

- Breast milk and formula are the best drinks for babies.
- Tap water should be boiled and cooled before drinking.
- Fruit juice and other sweet drinks are not recommended for children under 12 months of age.

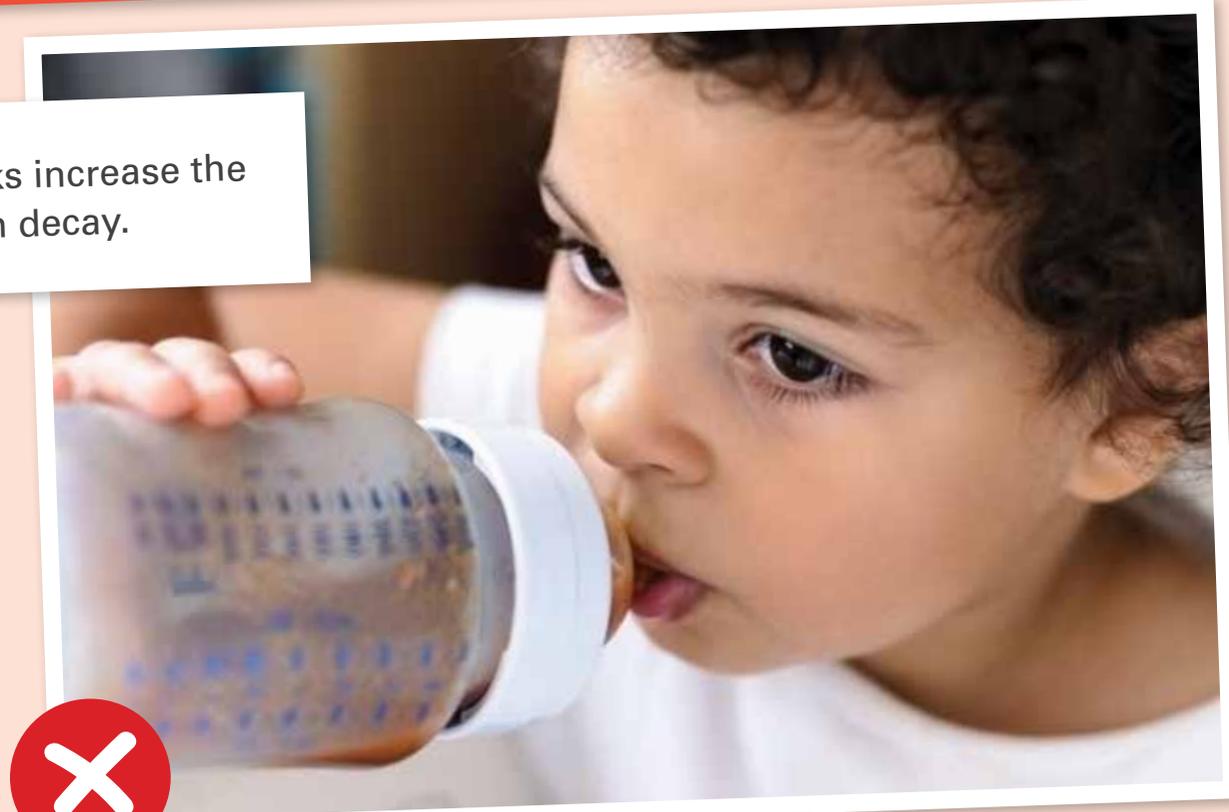
Over 12 months

- Plain milk is a healthy drink for children.
- Offer tap water regularly throughout the day.
- Fluoride in tap water helps protect teeth from decay.
- It is better to offer whole fruit instead of juice.



Children do not need sweet drinks

Sweet drinks increase the risk of tooth decay.



Amounts of sugar in common children's drinks



* When made up as directed – approximately 2 tablespoons of cordial added to a cup of water.

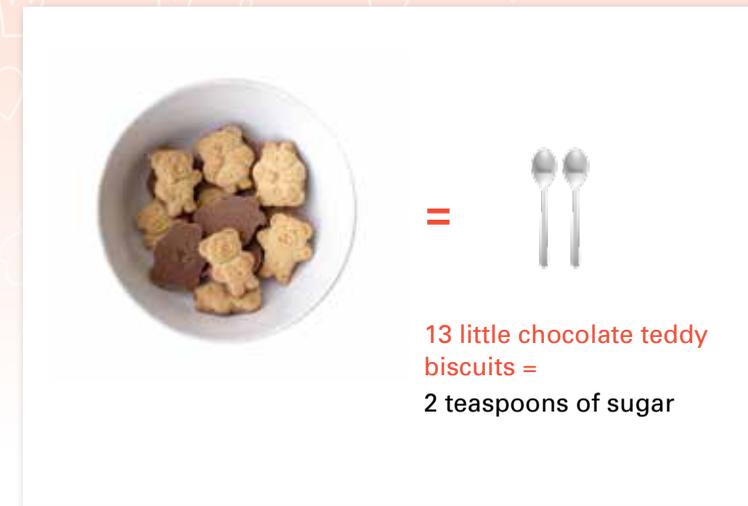
Healthy snacks between meals

- Offer healthy snacks between meals such as fresh fruit, chopped vegetables, plain yoghurt with no added sugar, cheese, wholemeal or wholegrain sandwiches and wholegrain dry biscuits.
- Allow 1½ hours break between each meal and snack.



Sugar in children's snacks

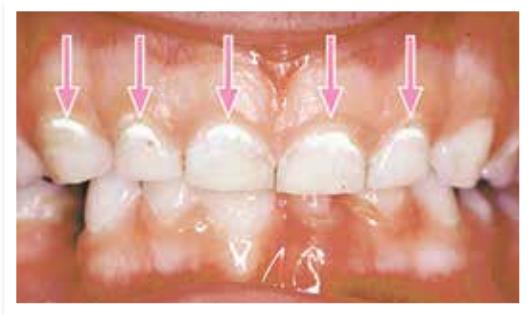
- Babies do not have a preference for sweet foods and drinks. This is something they learn when given sweet foods and drinks regularly.
- Sugar is the leading cause of decay in baby teeth. Children who eat a lot of sugary snacks are more likely to experience tooth decay.



Baby teeth can decay as soon as they appear

You can check for early signs of decay by lifting your child's top lip

Early signs of tooth decay can be reversed if your child is taken to the dentist



White chalky patches on the teeth along the gum line. This is the beginning of decay in the tooth enamel.

First stage of decay – see a dentist



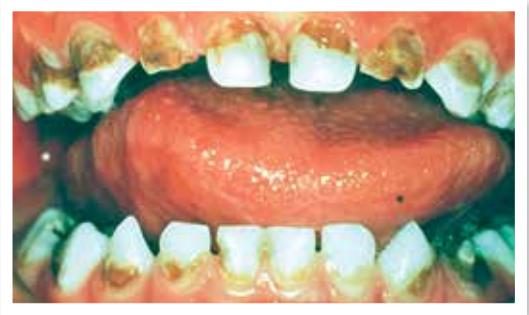
Yellow brown or black marks on teeth show decay.

Tooth decay is the second top cause for hospital visits that could be avoided in children under 5 years

Advanced stage of decay – an urgent dental appointment is needed



Top front teeth affected by decay.



Obvious decay present in most teeth.

Photo courtesy of Australian Dental Association Western Australian Branch.

Healthy meals

- The best meals for babies are those made at home from simple ingredients with no added sugar, honey or salt.
- From 12 months, children can enjoy a wide variety of healthy foods similar to the rest of the family.



Put baby to bed without a bottle

- Always put your baby to sleep without a bottle.
- When babies fall asleep with a bottle the milk stays in the mouth and on the teeth. This can cause tooth decay, especially on the upper front teeth.



Dummies

- If you decide to use a dummy wait until breast feeding is established.
- Don't put anything sweet on a dummy.
- Dummies or teats should not be placed in your own mouth before they are given to your baby.
- Using a dummy during play hours prevents baby from babbling and sound making, which is needed for speech development.
- A child can be helped to give up the dummy from one year of age.
- Thumb and finger sucking beyond 4 years can affect the position of teeth and your child's speech. If concerned talk to your dentist.



Introduce a cup at 6 months

Learning to hold and drink from a cup is an important new skill baby needs to learn. Phase out the bottle by 12 months of age.



Clean teeth as soon as they come through



Start with a damp cloth to gently wipe the gums and teeth morning and night.



Use a small soft headed toothbrush and help your child to brush their teeth morning and night.

- Under 18 months do not use toothpaste.
- 18 months – 6 years use low fluoride toothpaste.



How to brush children's teeth



- 1 From 18 months to 6 years use a pea sized amount of **low fluoride toothpaste**. If you do not have fluoride in your tap water, talk to your dentist about the right toothpaste to use.



- 3 Angle bristles of toothbrush towards the gum. Move the brush in gentle circles along the outer sides of the teeth and gums.



- 5 Use light back and forth motion on the chewing surfaces of the teeth.



- 2 Sit your child on your lap facing away from you or sideways to you, or stand behind the child. Tilt child's head back against your body so you can see all the surfaces of the teeth.



- 4 Continue to brush in gentle circles on the inside of the teeth and gums.



- 6 Encourage your child to spit out the toothpaste and not to swallow it. **Do not rinse.**

Children will need assistance to brush their teeth until 7-8 years of age.

Children can use a pea sized amount of standard fluoride toothpaste from six years of age.

After 12 months children do not need bottles

- Bottles should be phased out by 12 months of age.
- Children by this age can drink from a cup.



Dental visits

Regular check-ups are important for protecting your child's teeth.

- Your local public dental clinic provides free or low cost care to all children up to 12 years of age.
- Children do not go on a waiting list.



Your local public dental service is:

Address:

Phone:

Or see your private dentist



Caring for teeth is important for the whole family

- Be a role model for your children by brushing your teeth morning and night.
- Every family member has their own toothbrush.
- Help your child to brush their teeth until 7-8 years of age.
- Everyone has a dental check and decay is treated.
- If you are pregnant have a dental check before baby is born.



