Caring for your baby’s teeth and gums

One of the most exciting times for a new parent is seeing their baby’s first teeth appear. To keep your baby’s teeth healthy and beautiful, begin early to make good choices about keeping your baby’s mouth clean. This will be a good start to a lifetime of oral health.

Your dental habits can affect your child’s health.

When you care for your teeth, you’re caring for your baby’s teeth, too. That’s because germs from your mouth, called bacteria, can be passed to your baby’s mouth through kissing or sharing a spoon. These germs can cause gum disease and tooth decay.

Avoid baby bottle tooth decay.

Baby bottle tooth decay occurs when your baby’s teeth are exposed to sugary liquids for long periods of time. It can happen when babies suck on a bottle all day or are put to bed with a bottle. If the bottle has milk, formula, juice or something sweet in it, it leaves a sugary film on your baby’s teeth. This film can lead to decay and infection.1 When possible, breastfeeding is considered a better way to feed your baby. But do not let your baby sleep while feeding. This can also cause baby bottle tooth decay.

Babies lose their first teeth, but tooth decay in baby teeth is still serious. It can lead to:

• Poor eating habits
• Speech problems
• Oral infection
• Discolored, crooked or damaged adult teeth2

You should know:

• Take care of your teeth; germs from your mouth can be passed to your baby’s mouth and can cause tooth decay in your baby.
• Never put your baby to bed with a bottle of milk, formula, fruit juice or sweetened liquids.
• Clean your baby’s teeth as soon as they come in.
• Schedule a dentist visit for your baby within the first year.
Gently clean your baby's gums and teeth.

Clean your infant’s gums with a soft cloth and water. When teeth come in, start brushing twice daily. Use a little smear of fluoride toothpaste and a child’s soft toothbrush. As children get older, around seven or eight years old, they can brush their own teeth. You may still need to help to make sure the teeth get really clean.

Schedule a visit with the dentist.

Ask your dentist when he or she would like to see your child for a first visit. Usually this will be when the first tooth comes in. Often this happens when your baby is between six and 12 months of age. The earlier the first dentist visit occurs, the better. You will improve your chances of preventing dental problems.