



Caring for Oral Health in Children: Teething and Preventive Measures

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Abstract: Oral health in children, especially during the teething phase, is crucial for their overall well-being. This review article discusses the importance of caring for oral health in children, focusing on teething and preventive measures. It explores the teething process, common challenges, and effective strategies to promote good oral hygiene and prevent dental problems in pediatric patients. Emphasis is placed on the role of parents and caregivers in establishing healthy dental habits from an early age to ensure lifelong oral health.

Keywords: Oral health, children, teething, preventive measures, pediatric dentistry, dental hygiene, dental care, fluoride, nutrition, early childhood caries

Introduction: The development of good oral hygiene habits from an early age is essential for maintaining optimal oral health throughout life. Children experience various stages of dental development, with teething being a significant milestone. Teething can present challenges for both children and their caregivers, highlighting the importance of proper oral care and preventive measures. This review aims to provide comprehensive insights into caring for oral health in children, focusing on teething and preventive strategies.

Teething Process: Teething is the process by which an infant's primary teeth erupt through the gums. It typically begins around six months of age and continues until the child is around three years old, with a total of 20 primary teeth erupting during this period. The teething process can be accompanied by symptoms such as irritability, drooling, swollen gums, and increased biting or chewing behavior. While these symptoms are usually temporary, they can cause discomfort for the child and concern for parents.

During the teething phase, the primary teeth emerge in a specific sequence, starting with the lower central incisors, followed by the upper central incisors, lateral incisors, first molars, canines, and second molars. The timing of tooth eruption can vary among children, but most primary teeth should have erupted by the age of three. Teething can be a challenging time for both children and their caregivers, as the discomfort associated with erupting teeth can lead to irritability, disrupted sleep patterns, and changes in appetite.

Common Challenges and Solutions: Teething is a natural process, but it can present challenges for both children and their caregivers. Common symptoms associated with teething include:

1. Irritability and fussiness: Discomfort from teething can cause irritability and fussiness in children, making them more difficult to soothe.
2. Drooling: Excessive drooling is a common symptom of teething, as the increased saliva production helps lubricate the gums and ease the passage of erupting teeth.
3. Swollen gums: The pressure of erupting teeth against the gums can cause inflammation and swelling, leading to discomfort and sensitivity.
4. Increased biting or chewing behavior: Teething infants may exhibit a strong urge to bite or chew on objects to relieve pressure on their gums and alleviate discomfort.

To address these challenges, caregivers can implement various strategies to provide relief and comfort to teething children. Teething rings or toys made of silicone or rubber can be given to the child to chew on, as they provide a soothing sensation and massage the gums. These objects should be clean and free from harmful chemicals or small parts that could pose a choking hazard. Chilled teething rings or washcloths can also be beneficial, as the cold temperature helps numb the gums and reduce inflammation. However, it's essential to avoid using



teething gels containing benzocaine, as they can be harmful if ingested and are not recommended for use in young children.

Maintaining Oral Hygiene: Proper oral hygiene practices are essential for preventing dental problems and promoting healthy teeth and gums in children. Parents should begin cleaning their child's gums even before the first tooth erupts, using a soft, damp cloth or gauze to wipe away bacteria and food particles. Once teeth start to emerge, a small, soft-bristled toothbrush should be used to gently clean them twice daily with a smear of fluoride toothpaste. As the child grows, parents can gradually increase the amount of toothpaste to a pea-sized portion.

In addition to regular brushing, parents should encourage their children to develop other oral hygiene habits, such as flossing and rinsing with fluoride mouthwash. Flossing helps remove plaque and food particles from between the teeth and along the gumline, reducing the risk of cavities and gum disease. Fluoride mouthwash can help strengthen tooth enamel and prevent tooth decay, especially in areas that may be difficult to reach with a toothbrush. Supervision and assistance may be needed for young children to ensure they are using dental floss and mouthwash correctly.

Preventive Measures: In addition to proper oral hygiene practices, preventive measures such as fluoride treatment and dental sealants can help protect children's teeth from decay. Fluoride is a mineral that strengthens tooth enamel and makes it more resistant to acid attacks from bacteria. Topical fluoride application by a dentist or the use of fluoride toothpaste can significantly reduce the risk of cavities. Fluoride varnish is a common preventive treatment applied to the surfaces of teeth to provide extra protection against decay, particularly in children who are at higher risk.

Dental sealants are another preventive measure that can help protect children's teeth from cavities. Sealants are thin, plastic coatings applied to the chewing surfaces of molars to seal out bacteria and food particles, preventing decay. The application process is quick and painless, involving the cleaning and drying of the teeth followed by the application of the sealant material. Once applied, sealants can last for several years with proper care and maintenance, providing long-term protection against cavities.

Nutrition and Dietary Habits: Nutrition plays a crucial role in oral health, and promoting a balanced diet can help prevent dental problems in children. Limiting sugary snacks and beverages, such as candy, soda, and fruit juices, can reduce the risk of

cavities and tooth decay. These sugary foods and drinks provide fuel for bacteria in the mouth, which produce acids that can erode tooth enamel and cause cavities. Instead, parents should encourage their children to eat a variety of nutritious foods, including fruits, vegetables, dairy products, and lean proteins.

Fruits and vegetables are excellent choices for promoting oral health, as they are high in fiber and water content, which helps clean the teeth and stimulate saliva production. Dairy products such as milk, cheese, and yogurt are rich in calcium and phosphorus, essential minerals for building strong teeth and bones. Lean proteins such as chicken, fish, and beans provide important nutrients for overall health and well-being. Drinking fluoridated water can also contribute to optimal dental health, as fluoride helps strengthen tooth enamel and prevent cavities.

Role of Parents and Caregivers: Parents and caregivers play a vital role in instilling good oral hygiene habits in children and fostering a positive attitude towards dental care. By setting a good example and making oral hygiene a priority in the household, parents can influence their children's behavior and attitudes towards oral health. Regular dental visits should be scheduled from an early age to monitor dental development, identify any issues early on, and receive professional cleanings and treatments as needed.

Parents should also be proactive in teaching their children about the importance of oral health and providing them with the tools and knowledge they need to take care of their teeth and gums. This includes demonstrating proper brushing and flossing techniques, supervising children's oral hygiene routines, and ensuring they have access to fluoride toothpaste and other dental products. Open communication with the dentist is essential, as parents can seek advice on oral hygiene practices, dietary recommendations, and preventive treatments tailored to their child's specific needs.

It's crucial for parents to create a positive and supportive environment that encourages children to take responsibility for their oral health. This can involve praising children for their efforts in brushing and flossing, rewarding them for good oral hygiene habits, and making dental care a fun and enjoyable experience. Parents can also involve children in decisions about their oral health, such as choosing toothbrushes and toothpaste flavors or scheduling dental appointments.

Regular dental visits are an essential aspect of maintaining oral health in children, as they allow dentists to monitor dental development, detect any issues early on, and provide preventive



treatments as needed. The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry recommends that children visit the dentist for their first check-up by age one or within six months of the eruption of their first tooth. During these visits, dentists can assess the child's oral health, provide guidance on oral hygiene practices, and discuss any concerns or questions that parents may have.

Conclusion: Caring for oral health in children, especially during the teething phase, requires a proactive approach from parents and caregivers. By understanding the teething process, addressing common challenges, and implementing preventive measures, children can enjoy healthy smiles for years to come. Emphasizing the importance of proper oral hygiene, nutrition, and regular dental care lays the foundation for lifelong oral health habits. Through education and support, parents can empower their children to take charge of their oral health and enjoy the benefits of a healthy smile.

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