



## MILK TEETH IN CHILDREN

### Why are the milk teeth called so?

Milk teeth are called so due to their white colour which resembles the colour of milk. The milk teeth are whiter than the permanent teeth which replace them. The refractive index of milk teeth is similar to that of milk and hence they are called so.

### At what age do the teeth start erupting?

The milk teeth start appearing at 6 months of age. It is quite normal for the teeth to erupt 3-6 months later than the expected time. However delay beyond 6 months may be an indication that you should consult your dentist.

### Does the pregnant woman's diet affect the child's teeth?

The expectant mother should have a diet that is rich in calcium to ensure the healthy development of the baby's bones and teeth. It should be noted here that the teeth buds are formed in the mother's womb itself. Thus good sources of calcium such as cheese, milk, yoghurt, leafy vegetables and dairy products should be taken in adequate measure during pregnancy to ensure healthy teeth and bones in the child.

### Can medicines taken during pregnancy affect the teeth?

There are certain medicines and antibiotics that should be avoided during pregnancy. These drugs can cause defective development of the developing foetus. Tetracycline antibiotics when consumed by pregnant women cause permanent brownish grey staining of the child's teeth. Thus self-medication should be avoided during pregnancy and medicines should only be taken after consultation with the physician.

### At what age should I first consult the dentist?

From birth to the age of 6 months there are no visible teeth in the mouth, yet beneath the gums, lie the roots of the milk teeth. It is necessary for parents to clean the gum-pads with a soft cloth or cotton dipped in water. Thus, oral hygiene begins right from birth. It is a good idea to consult the dentist once at around six months of age when the first milk teeth are expected to emerge.

### What are the habits that are harmful to the teeth?

Thumb sucking, mouth breathing and

tongue thrusting are some of the commonly observed habits in growing children. These habits, if discontinued by the age of 5 years, may not affect the position of permanent teeth, but if continued beyond this age can cause mal-alignment of teeth. Attempts must be made to pinpoint the cause and treat it to break the habit.

### Why do milk teeth become mobile?

As the permanent teeth start emerging they wear off the roots of the milk teeth. Thus the milk teeth lose their support in the bone and become mobile. The milk teeth are ultimately shed off and are replaced by the permanent teeth.

### Are spaces between teeth normal in children?

It is normal to find spaces between milk teeth in children. These spaces help later in accommodating the bigger permanent teeth. Thus absence of spaces between the milk teeth in children may be a fore-warning that they may not have adequate space to accommodate the bigger permanent teeth which may erupt in a crowded arrangement.

### What are the causes of tooth decay?

Causes of tooth decay in children are the same as in adults, but the decay occurs more quickly. An important factor in children responsible for causing tooth decay is the child being bottle-fed and put to bed. This type of decay is extensive and is called nursing bottle caries.

### Why should milk teeth be saved?

Removal of the front milk teeth should be avoided before the age of 4 years, and the other milk teeth before the age of 9 years. If early removal of teeth is necessary, an appliance called a space-maintainer should be constructed for the child to wear.



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