



Need help with teething?



1. Introduction – What is Teething

Teething is a phase that every baby passes through on their way to childhood. For many babies this can be a painful process and can take its toll on frazzled parents. There are a number of signs which indicate your baby may have started teething, and there are a quite a few things you can try to make the process easier!

- Babies are born with their teeth below their gumlines, although very occasionally they may be born with a tooth already showing which can lead to difficulties breastfeeding. Six months is the most common age for a child to sprout their first tooth but commonly varies a month or two before or after this age. Some children don't get their first tooth until almost a year old.
- A full set of primary teeth is usually present by around two and a half years of age and the first permanent teeth appear at around six years.
- As a general indicator, it often takes around a 3-7 days of teething before the tooth will begin to show and the pain subsides.
- The first tooth to show will usually be one of the middle two teeth on the lower gum. Upper front teeth usually come in 1 to 2 months after the lower front teeth.

So how do you know your child has begun the teething process?

2. Signs of Teething

It is important not to use teething to explain away what might be the signs of illness. If you feel your child may be ill you should seek medical advice. Just like adults, children show pain in a variety of ways, but signs of teething may include:

- Irritability - Cutting a tooth is painful, so naturally your baby may be fussy and cry more than usual. You may find that your baby is irritable for a week or so, as the tooth slowly rises to the surface causing pain and discomfort.
- Excessive dribbling - while common for most babies, it can increase during the teething process.
- Chin rash - this excessive dribbling can cause chin rash from the baby's skin being wet with saliva. To avoid chin rash, be sure to use a soft cloth or bib to periodically wipe your baby's mouth and chin area.
- Coughing – the excess saliva can sometimes cause your baby to cough or gag momentarily
- Chewing or gnawing - your baby will want to gnaw or bite down on anything she or he can find. Whether it's your fingers or a toy, your baby is looking to lock down on something to relieve the pressure from under his or her gums.
- Low level fever – it is important to be aware of this symptom as it may be caused by something else and should be referred to your doctor
- Red or swollen gums and cheeks – often from the child chewing more or putting their hand in their mouth as well as mild inflammation from the tooth itself
- Cold-like symptoms – possibly caused by your baby putting their hands in their mouth more often, again be aware and consult your doctor.
- Pulling their ear or rubbing their cheek – possibly associated with pain in the baby's gums being sensed in the adjoining ear or cheek, more associated with molar teething.
- Diahorrea – this much debated symptom is thought to come from swallowing excessive saliva. Since your baby can lose a significant amount of fluid, consult your doctor. This can also lead to an increased incidence of nappy rash.
- Poor sleeping – waking up during the night or not going down easily is often caused by teething pain being disruptive to a baby's regular sleep timing.
- Slight appetite reduction – being disconcerted by the pain of teething may put a baby off their food

3. Common Remedies!

- Give lots of sympathy! Distract your baby with toys or other play.
- Teething gels such as from Bonjela contain a mild painkiller. They say “Apply enough Bonjela to cover the tip of the index finger, rub well into affected area not more often than every 3 hours. Not suitable for babies under four months old.” Read the pack for full details.
- Teething rings or toys, cooled in the fridge/freezer if possible. Don’t leave it in the freezer to solidify because it will be too hard and too cold! Teething rings often contain a gel or water based solution that can maintain a low temperature. Do not sterilise them in a steamer, boiler or microwave. The cold temperature temporarily reduces the blood flow to the gums and helps to numb the pain.
- Teething tablets such as Hylands. Tablets will dissolve instantly on the tongue or may be dissolved first in one tablespoon of water. These may have been withdrawn from sale in the US, but seem to still be sold here along with other brands.
- Teething biscuits are useful, but remember to choose one low in salt and sugar.
- Try giving your child cold food, hot food may be painful to eat. Maybe apple puree or yoghurt. Even cold slices of apple.
- Scrubbed carrot or corn cob with the corn kernels removed. Even a cold clean cloth might do the trick. Again this gives them something to bite down onto, but make sure it is clean and a low risk of inhaling or suffocating. Maybe use a mesh feeder from Woolies. Another common choice is a rubber handle toothbrush!
- Putting an ice cube, crushed ice or frozen breast milk into a cloth and knotted off for them to suck. Again beware of any risk of suffocating.
- Sugar free paracetamol – such as the range of Childrens Panadol Drops or Nurofen for Baby. Only if your child is in distress.
- Use a clean finger (or cold teething ring, even a cold spoon) to gently rub your baby's gum for about 2 minutes at a time. Many babies find this soothing, although they may protest at first.
- Amber bead necklaces are a common teether, especially in Europe.
- Some parents also find natural remedies helpful such as a small amount of pure vanilla extract or clove oil rubbed into the gums. Another option could be natural liquorice from a healthfood store which feels cool and helps numb the gums as the baby chews it.

