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Indian Academy of Pediatrics (IAP)

105 IAP Guidelines for Parents and Caregivers

Taking Care of Your Child in Health and Disease



Editor-in-Chief
Piyush Gupta

Executive Editor
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Foreword
YK Amdekar

JAYPEE

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Dental Care, Diapers, and Clothing

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Sketches: Anand Naregal

DENTAL HYGIENE

Q1

Are baby teeth important, as they fall anyways?

Primary/milk teeth/baby teeth give shape to your child's face and help to guide permanent teeth into the right position. They are crucial for learning to eat and to speak. Thus, it is important to care for them.

Protecting baby teeth is important as they are around for 12 years and not just as tools for chewing. Healthy baby teeth are also important for language development, jaw growth, and coordination of the musculature as they are for esthetics and therefore for your child's self-esteem.

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Q2

How does tooth decay occur in milk teeth?

Primary teeth have a thinner outer enamel (a thin, hard, and white substance that covers the tooth) than permanent teeth. This puts them at risk for early childhood tooth decay, which can begin even before the first tooth appears.

Causes

- Decay is caused by bacteria and happens more easily if teeth keep coming into contact with sweet liquids—such as formula, milk, juice, shakes and ice-creams, and are not cleaned regularly.
- Early childhood tooth decay can affect your child's health and cause pain, making it hard for your child to sleep, eat, or speak. It can also affect your child's ability to concentrate and learn.
- Children who develop dental decay at an early age are more likely to suffer from it throughout childhood.

How to identify?

Early signs of caries can be seen as white spots on the teeth that appear first. Then, an early cavity appears that has a light brown color on the tooth. The tooth color progressively becomes darker and a hole (cavitation) may appear. Symptoms such as sensitivity to sweets and cold beverages or food may occur.

Q3

How can we prevent dental cavities?

Cavities happen when bacteria and food left on the teeth after eating are not brushed away. Acid collects on a tooth, softening its enamel until a hole or *cavity* forms.

Here is how to keep cavities away:

- *Start good oral habits early*. Teach kids to brush at least twice a day (after eating) and to floss regularly.
- *Limit or avoid some foods*. Sugary foods, juices, candy (especially sticky gummy candy, gummy vitamins, or fruit leather or "roll-ups") can erode enamel and cause cavities. It is best to avoid them. If your kids eat these foods, have them rinse their mouth or brush their teeth after eating to wash away the sugar. The same goes for taking sweetened liquid medicines: always have kids rinse or brush afterward.

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Q4

When should dental care begin and why early childhood dental visits are important?

Regular dental care should begin by 1 year of age, with a dental check-up at least twice each year for most children. Some children may need check-ups more often.

Birth to 6 Months Old

- Clean your baby's mouth with water (should be avoided as it may inadvertently lead to drinking water) and a cloth or gauze or use a soft infant toothbrush after feedings and at bedtime. Both should be avoided in breastfed baby as white milk patch on the tongue is protecting your baby against the entry of bugs.
- Ensure exclusive breastfeeding.

6–12 Months Old

- During this time, the first tooth should appear. But, do not worry if your baby does not have a tooth until 15 months of age.
- Brush teeth after each feeding and at bedtime with a finger brush or a very small, soft-bristled brush.
  Use a very small amount of toothpaste, about the size of a grain of rice **(Fig. 1)**.
- As your child begins to walk, stay alert of possible dental or facial injuries.



Fig. 1: Using a very small amount of toothpaste.

1–3 Years Old

- Follow the schedule of dental checkups cleanings, as recommended by your child's dentist. Generally, dental checkups and cleanings are recommended every 6 months for children and adults.
- At about age of 3 years, as your child learns to rinse and spit, brushing with a pea-sized portion of toothpaste is best.

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For All Ages

- Rinse toothbrushes thoroughly after brushing and ensure that each one can dry without touching other toothbrushes.
- Replace toothbrushes every few months, when the bristles become flattened with use.
- Between meals, quench a child's thirst with water. Do not offer candy, dried fruit (including raisins), and sugared drinks or juices.
- Take your child for regular dental visits. Early checkups help to prevent cavities and tooth decay, which can lead to pain, trouble concentrating, and other medical issues.

It is not uncommon to see many young children with cavities caused by falling asleep with a bottle of milk or juice. This practice is to be strongly discouraged. The importance of encouraging children to drink milk and water from a cup as they approach their first birthday need to be emphasized to parents.

As kids get older, their bite and the straightness of their teeth can become an issue. Orthodontists know that manipulation of teeth at a younger age can be easier and more effective in the long run. Younger children's teeth can be positioned with minor orthodontic devices, preventing major treatment later.

Q5

Which is the best toothbrush and toothpaste for children?

Toothbrushes: It is important to *choose the right toothbrush*—one designed especially for children aged 2–5 years. These toothbrushes have small oval heads, soft bristles of different heights and nonslip, and cushioned handles. They may have cartoons and fun designs on the handle, which your child might like.

Keeping Toothbrushes Clean

- After cleaning your child's teeth and gums, rinse the toothbrush with tap water.
- Store the toothbrush upright in an open container to allow it to air-dry.
- Replace toothbrushes every 3–4 months, or when the bristles get worn or frayed.

Toothpaste and Fluoride

- You can start using low-fluoride toothpaste on your child's toothbrush from 2 years of age.
- Fluoride is a safe mineral that keeps teeth strong and prevents tooth decay.
- Fluoride works best when you get it in very small amounts throughout the day in fluoridated tap water, foods and drinks containing fluoride, and low-fluoride toothpaste.

JAYPEE BROTHERS

Q6

What is the right brushing technique for kids?

The six steps show you how to brush your child's teeth correctly (18 months to 6 years):

1. Smear a pea-sized amount of toothpaste onto a soft children's toothbrush.
2. Sit the child in your lap, facing away from you, or stand behind taller children. Tilt the child's head back against your body so you can see all the surfaces of the teeth.
3. Angle the bristles of the toothbrush toward the gum. Move the brush in gentle circles to clean the outer sides of the teeth and gums.
4. Brush in gentle circles on the inside of the teeth and gums.
5. Brush back and forward on the chewing surface of the teeth.
6. After brushing all the surfaces, encourage your child to spit out the toothpaste.

Q7

Can sweetened liquids cause tooth decay?

Tooth decay in infants and very young children is often referred to as baby bottle tooth decay. It happens when sweetened liquids or those with natural sugars (like milk, formula, and fruit juice) cling to an infant's teeth for a long time. Bacteria in the mouth thrive on this sugar and make acids that attack the teeth.

Children whose pacifiers are frequently dipped in sugar or syrup are at risk. Giving an infant a sugary drink at nap-time or night-time is particularly harmful because the flow of saliva decreases during sleep.

Although baby bottle tooth decay typically happens in the upper front teeth, other teeth may also be affected.

JAYPEE BROTHERS

Q8

Is nibbling in between meals OK?

After a meal, our saliva can repair the dental enamel that has been corroded by the food acids, but this process takes some time. Frequent and/or particularly sweet snacks overstrain this natural and protective repair mechanism; therefore, try to minimize nibbling on baked treats, bananas, candies, or sweets between meals.

Instead offer your kids sugarless products such as whole grain homemade bread and fruits. Be sure your child eats correctly to maintain a healthy body and teeth:

- Shop smart. Do not normally stock your pantry with sugary or starchy snacks.
- Limit the number of snack times. Choose healthy snacks.
- Provide a balanced diet and save foods with sugar or starch for mealtimes.
- Do not put your young child to bed with a bottle of milk, formula, or juice.

Q9

Can thumb sucking, lip sucking and tongue thrusting cause dental problems?

It is normal for infants to suck their thumbs, fingers, or toys, to an extent. Object sucking gives children a sense of emotional security and comfort. But, if these habits continue beyond the age of 5 years, when the permanent teeth begin to come in, dental problems can occur.

Depending on the frequency, intensity, and duration, the teeth can be pushed out of alignment, causing them to protrude and create an overbite. Your child may also have difficulty with the correct pronunciation of words. In addition, the upper and lower jaws can become malaligned and the roof of the mouth might become malformed.

There are dental appliances your child can wear in the mouth to prevent these habits. These appliances are cemented to the upper teeth, sit on the roof of the mouth, and make thumb sucking or tongue thrusting harder and less pleasurable.

JAYPEE BROTHERS

Q10

What is fluoride treatment and what are dental sealants?

Fluoride Treatment

Dentists provide professional fluoride treatments in the form of a highly concentrated rinse, foam, gel, or varnish. The treatment may be applied with a swab, brush, tray, or mouthwash.

These treatments have much more fluoride than what is in your water or toothpaste. They only take a few minutes to apply. You may be asked to avoid eating or drinking for 30 minutes after the treatment so the fluoride can fully absorb.

Dental Sealants

As your child's permanent teeth grow in, the dentist can help to prevent decay by applying a thin wash of resin (called a sealant) to the back teeth, where most chewing is done. This protective coating keeps bacteria from settling in the hard-to-reach crevices of the molars. But, make sure that kids know that sealants are not a replacement for good brushing and regular flossing.

DIAPERS AND CLOTHES

Q11

Is it safe for me to use diapers for my baby throughout the day?

Diapers for babies are safe if judiciously used with understanding and adequate measures. Due to its ease of use and disposal, it is preferred by a lot of mothers and is extensively used nowadays. Choose the diapers according to need and not according to brand.

- When traveling for prolonged period of time, use disposable diapers to ensure safe and hassle-free travel.
- When at home, use light cotton diapers or nappies and change these frequently, every 2–3 hours or when soiled (whichever is earlier).
- Many babies wake up frequently at night due to soiling of nappies, it might be a good idea to use diapers for them to ensure good sleep.

Diapers are in direct contact with baby's delicate skin, and hence, prone to rashes and allergies. Use of appropriate rash-free and protective creams and adequate diaper free airing time is essential to ensure healthy skin and happy babies.

JAYPEE BROTHERS

Q12

What precautions should take before and after using diaper for my baby?

Diapers are in direct contact with the baby's skin and are known to cause rashes, contact dermatitis, and even fungal infection if not used properly **(Fig. 2)**. So, it is advisable to take precautions to avoid side effects:

- First check that the baby does not have any rash in the area.
- Use nappy cream or moisturizer lotion after cleaning the area with soft cloth or cotton and water.
- Change the diaper every 2–3 hours, even if it is dry. This ensures that the baby remains comfortable, rash free, and dry.
- Ensure that you change the diaper immediately if soiled with stools/urine.
- After removing the diaper, leave the area open and dry to air for some time before putting on the next diaper. This is done to let the skin breathe.

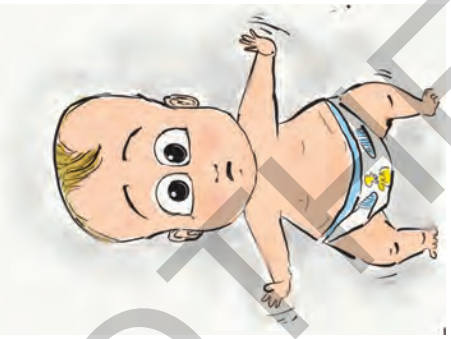

Fig. 2: Precautions should be taken while using diapers for a baby.

Q13

What is the ideal age for us to stop using diapers for our baby?

In many parts of the world, like in India, toilet training begins in early infancy. Without force but with timely intervention and regular methods, babies learn the basic toilet skills and never or rarely wear diapers. This has a huge benefit in terms of preventing fungal or urinary tract infections and is cheaper. However, with the growing clan of "potty experts", toilet training is starting from 18–24 months. Children usually take longer to be dry at night than in the day. However, once your child is reasonably toilet trained, you can try leaving off the nappy at night, encouraging him to use the toilet before going to sleep and as soon as he wakes up.

In certain populations, it is only after the age of 3 years that children are taught toilet skills and diapers are stopped at 3–4 years of age. But, the downside of these are many compared to any benefit and should be discouraged.

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Q14

My mother and other elders at home are insisting that I keep the baby swaddled all the time. Is it essential to do so?

Swaddling has been a part of caring of babies for centuries. It makes the baby feel like it is in the womb or being snuggled close. By keeping the swaddle for sleepy times, you are creating associations that will help your baby sleep well.

Do's and Don'ts

- Do not keep them swaddled all the time and not if they do not like it, listen to the signals by your baby. It may cause over-heating in the babies.
- Unswaddle them when they are awake, feeding, or playing. It will ensure that the baby is wide awake and ready to breast-feed adequately.
- Babies' legs need to be able to bend up and out at the hips for healthy development of hips, unswaddling at timely intervals ensures that.
- Do not swaddle too tightly; if baby rolls over her tummy, she/he will not be able to roll back. This increases risk of suffocation **(Fig. 3)**.
- Swaddle only with a light blanket and always leave two fingers of space between baby's chest and cloth.



Fig. 3: Swaddling of a baby.

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Q15

Should I be making my newborn baby wear a cap even when at home?

There is a common misconception that newborn babies need caps to stay warm. It is not true in healthy full-term babies. The temperature regulation is by the maternal contact.

Caps should be used when stepping outside with the baby. At that time, judge whether you feel chilled or not. If you feel cold, it is understood that your baby is cold too.

Respond appropriately to the change in temperatures to avoid overheating the baby by unnecessary head cover.

Q16

My baby sucks on the mittens I put on his hands. Should I stop using the mittens?

Most parents believe that newborn babies must wear scratch mittens to prevent injuries to themselves by scratching, due to the uncoordinated movements normally seen in them, especially when hungry. However, this can be managed better by keeping fingernails short and responding quickly to a baby's feeding cues.

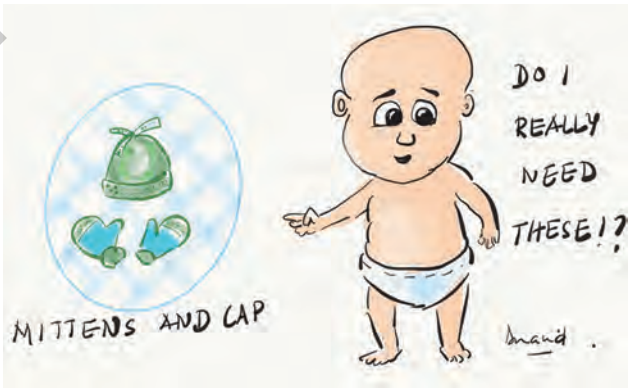

Fig. 4: Mittens and a cap for a baby.

Reasons why mittens should not be used:

- After all babies have managed perfectly well without mittens in the mother's womb **(Fig. 4)**.
- Babies cannot comfort themselves by sucking on fingers or thumb.
- It would lead to missing feeding cues.
- It acts as a barrier to the skin-to-skin contact which is so essential while breastfeeding.

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Q17

What kind of clothes should I choose to buy for my baby considering our climatic conditions?

When selecting clothes for your baby, it is natural to get swayed by the fancy coloring and accessorizing that is widely available. Keep a few things in mind while purchasing clothes.

- Cotton is the most suitable clothing, compatible with our kind of climate. It is safe from allergies, allows the skin to breathe, and prevents overheating.
- Look out for buttons and other decorative items on the clothing, if pulled out by the baby easily, it can be a choking hazard.
- Prefer to buy clothing with front opening and check for good quality zipper and buttons which are safe and skin friendly for the babies.

Q18

How should I wash my baby's clothes?

Baby's skin as we know is delicate and prone to infection and rashes when exposed to foreign irritant substances. This can be due to the detergent you are using or that the clothes have not got adequately disinfected.

Tips for Washing of Clothes

- Wash new clothes before putting them on the baby to make them safe, clean, and free from any allergy.
- Wash nappies and diapers separately even if you are washing the baby's clothes with the rest at home.
- Avoid using very hot or warm water, it will cause deforming or discoloring of the clothes.
- Rinse the clothes more number of times in water.
- Dry them in open space in fresh air and sunlight.
- Use a dye-free and chemical-free detergent to wash the clothes.

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Q19

My teenage daughter is developing rashes in her inner thighs. It gets worse after wearing jeans. Could it be because of allergy or because they are tight?

The advertisements of skin fit jeans as the most fashionable attire attract a lot of attention from teenagers **(Fig. 5)**. But what is not advertised is the multitude of problems these clothes can cause when worn for long periods of time.

- Nerve compression especially in girls causing pins and needle sensations, tingling, and numbness in the thighs.
- *Spinal and muscle disorders:* Tight jeans or skirts can cause restriction of natural movement of muscles and joints while walking and sitting. Body hugging jeans with high heels cause knee problems.
- *Pain in the neck:* Because of tight collars and tops.
- *Low sperm count*: Excessively tight inner wear may affect sperm metabolism.
- *Fungal infections*: Candidiasis can occur with prolonged wearing of tight jeans.



Fig. 5: Side effects of wearing a tight jeans.

Q20

What kind of clothing should be worn by children when they have fever?

Light cotton clothing should be used to prevent overheating in a child with fever. Do not bundle up the febrile child with heavy blankets or too many warm clothes, as they may impair heat loss from the body.

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