



A PENNY FOR YOUR CHILD'S TEETH

Your baby's first set of teeth are more important than you think and require your very real attention

words sabrina lee photo courtesy of t32 dental group



Many myths surrounding the process of teething persist today. We still associate teething with symptoms like fever and diarrhoea, though these symptoms have been proven not to be directly related to the process of teething. We otherwise worry about our children's discomfort as their teeth erupt or fall off, causing us to sugar-coat their pacifiers or comfort them with gifts from the mythical tooth-fairy.

These beliefs distract us from taking the right steps to take care of the actual set of teeth our children are developing. Tooth decay in children is a real problem in Singapore. At least 50 per cent of pre-schoolers suffer from tooth decay, with 40 per cent suffering from a severe form of decay called Early Childhood Caries (ECC). Children as young as the age of six have even required root canal surgery. While genetics may influence the quality of our children's teeth, these startling statistics tell us it is the lack of proper dental care and habits that are causing bad teeth in our children.

Never Too Early

We often neglect the importance of our children's first set of teeth, because, well, it's only the first set. Why should we bother about maintaining a set of teeth that is not here to stay? What most of us do not know is that a lack of proper care for this temporary set of teeth can have lasting effects on the child's development.

Milk teeth help children chew food and speak clearly. They also temporarily hold space so that permanent teeth can grow in proper alignment. Poor dental habits can affect the development of the face and jaw, and decay in milk teeth eventually affect the health of permanent teeth. Most importantly, the fostering of good dental habits from a young age helps our children retain these habits when they grow up.

Righting the Wrongs with Myobrace®

Many children in Singapore experience crooked teeth from as young as three to five years of age. Though crooked teeth may be hereditary, parents have more control over it than they think. Over the last 20 years, Myofunctional Research Co. (MRC) has identified a number of habits that are remediable to ensure that our child's teeth and jaw can develop properly and fully. Since 1989, MRC pioneered the Myobrace® treatment which involves wearing a series of removable appliances, worn for an hour each day and while sleeping, in conjunction with completing a range of Myobrace® activities best described as physiotherapy for the growing face. Myobrace® is growing in popularity especially in the U.S. and Australia.

Myobrace® caters to the escalating public insistence on non-invasive, earlier and more stable treatments by addressing the causes inhibiting a child's natural facial development as soon as they become evident. The fundamental keys to this treatment are obtaining correct nasal breathing, correcting tongue resting position, and retraining the oral muscles to function correctly.

Apart from wearing a series of removable dental appliances, Dr. Bruce Lee from T32 Dental Group advises parents to watch for correct breathing and tongue posture, which affect not only the physical development of the teeth, jaw, and face, but also the overall health of the child. "Many infants/children suffer from daily runny, or blocked noses, even enlarged tonsils makes normal breathing through the nose difficult. This could be caused by allergies to food, environmental or hereditary reasons.

Hence when a child starts to breathe through their mouths, it allows them to be more susceptible to germs and bacteria as air enters the lungs through the throat directly, bypassing the natural filters in their nose. This results in frequent throat or ear infections, poor neck and upper body postures, and even vomiting in the mornings. Mouth-breathing may affect the child's sleep quality, causing daytime in-attentiveness and stunting the overall growth of the child," says Dr. Lee, who heads the Myofunctional Programme at T32 Junior, the paediatric department of T32 Dental Group. The way the tongue is postured is also a key factor that thwarts facial and jaw growth. So, instead of playing tooth fairy and investing in gifts when your child loses teeth, it is perhaps wiser to invest in proper dental care for your child and inculcate good dental habits while your child is young.

MOUTH BREATHING AND DENTAL HEALTH

We all know brushing and flossing are important, however, there are some other things that are important to do, and to avoid.



ORAL HYGIENE

"You can start getting your child used to cleaning their teeth even before the teeth have erupted. Wipe your child's gums twice a day with a soft cloth or disposable child's tooth wipes (e.g. Spiffies)."

"Make tooth brushing a 'fun' family activity. Children like to mimic what their parents or older siblings do so brush together with them and make it a game."

"The first dental visit is often more to familiarise your child with the dentist and the dental clinic than to do any actual treatment. Try not to wait until there is a problem such as a cavity or traumatic injury before bringing your child."

DR. CHIN SHOU KING,
CLINIC DIRECTOR & DENTAL SURGEON,
T32 Dental Centre, T32 Dental Group



BAD HABITS

"Chronic mouth-breathing may worsen adenoid and tonsil infections, as well as cause poor neck and upper body postures."

"Poor habits like thumb-sucking, tongue-thrusting and reverse swallowing may result in not only poor alignment of teeth, but also affects the growth and development of the face and jaw."

DR. BRUCE LEE, CLINIC DIRECTOR & DENTAL SURGEON,
T32 Dental Centre, T32 Dental Group