



THE NATIONAL CENTER ON
Health



Brush Up on Oral Health

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- **Head Start and Babies Who Are Teething**
- **Teething Basics**
- **Strategies for Head Start Staff to Share with Parents Whose Babies Are Teething**
- **Cook's Corner: Foods to Ease Teething Pain**

Did You Know?

- By the time a child is 3 years old, he or she will have 20 primary (baby) teeth.
- Typically, the two bottom front teeth come in first, followed by the two top front teeth a few weeks later.

Head Start and Babies Who Are Teething



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Teething happens when a baby's primary teeth come into the mouth. For some babies, teething is uncomfortable. Head Start staff, including home visitors, classroom teachers, and family service coordinators, can give guidance and support to parents whose babies are teething.

This issue of *Brush Up on Oral Health* provides information on teething and offers strategies Head Start staff can share with parents to comfort their babies who have teething pain.

Teething Basics

Teething can start any time between ages 3 and 12 months. Most babies begin teething around age 6 months. As the primary teeth come into the mouth, babies might become cranky, drool more, not want to eat solid foods, have sore or swollen gums, and chew on things to ease the pressure from the tooth pushing through the gum.

Strategies for Head Start Staff to Share with Parents Whose Babies Are Teething

- **Keep it safe:** Choose safe teething toys. Here are some ideas:

- Make sure liquid-filled teething toys are made of durable material that the baby can't chew a hole into.
- Find teething toys that don't have loose pieces that could break off in a baby's mouth and cause choking.
- Don't put a teething toy, including chewbeads, a chew necklace, or a pacifier on a cord and hang it around a baby's neck or attach it to clothes. It could get tangled around the baby's neck and cause choking.



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- **Clean it:** Many strategies for comforting a teething baby include putting something in the baby's mouth. Everything that goes in the mouth should be cleaned first to keep the baby healthy. Read the pacifier's or teething toy's package for directions on how to clean it. Some items are dishwasher safe and some are not.
- **Massage it:** Gently rub the baby's gums with a clean finger for about 2 minutes. Many babies find the pressure soothing. For babies who already have some teeth, be careful the baby doesn't bite you!
- **Cool it:** Cold helps ease the pain of sore gums. Give the baby a cool clean wet washcloth, spoon, pacifier, or teething ring to chew on. Teething rings can be put in the refrigerator but not the freezer. Chewing frozen teething rings can make a baby's cheeks or chin become bumpy and turn reddish-purple. Note: To prevent mouth injuries, do not let a baby walk while holding a spoon.
- **Freeze it:** Some frozen foods can help ease teething pain. See Cook's Corner for two examples.
- **Don't use it:** Oral health and medical providers don't recommend using teething gels and liquids on babies' gums because they can cause serious health problems, including death. If nothing works to ease a baby's teething pain, encourage parents to ask their baby's physician or dentist for directions on how to use pain medicine safely.

In addition to the suggestions given above, the American Academy of Pediatrics has information and tips that can help parents comfort a baby who is teething (available in print and audio format in [English](#) and [Spanish](#)).

Cook's Corner: Foods to Ease Teething Pain

Here's a delicious healthy snack that can be given to babies who are teething.

Ingredients

1 banana or plain bagel

Directions

1. If using a banana, peel it and cut into 6 thick pieces. If using a bagel, cut bagel halves into quarters.
2. Place the banana or bagel pieces on a cookie sheet, making sure they don't touch each other.
3. Put the sheet in the freezer for 20–30 minutes, or until the banana or bagel pieces are frozen.
4. Place the frozen banana or bagel pieces in a plastic freezer bag or container.
5. Squeeze the air out of the freezer bag (if using), mark the date on the bag or container, and put it in the freezer. Frozen bananas and bagel pieces can be stored for up to 4 months.
6. Comfort the teething baby with one frozen banana or bagel piece.



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Note: Bananas and bagels contain sugar that can cause tooth decay. Give these foods to a teething baby once in a while and not throughout the day. Offer the food while the baby is sitting in a high chair.

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School readiness begins with health!