

In the last edition of the Totally Locally Times I talked about Dental Health, in particular relation to helping a healthier pregnancy. This time I am looking at caring for Babies' and Toddlers' teeth – starting out with good dental habits to ensure a healthy smile for life.

Tooth decay can start as soon as your baby's first tooth arrives but the good news is that this can be prevented and is totally avoidable.

Start brushing your baby's teeth twice a day as soon as their first tooth grows. Use a gentle, baby's toothbrush and a tiny amount of mild, fluoride-containing toothpaste such as Aquafresh's Milk Teeth. Always supervise your young child with their toothbrush and try and get them to spit out the toothpaste when finished – blowing a raspberry usually works! Some youngsters go through stages of being reluctant to have their teeth brushed so try and make it fun, perhaps try brushing when they are in the bath; it's OK even if they are just chewing on the brush sometimes as at least this is getting the fluoride on to their teeth for protection.

Your baby will also be moving onto solid foods about this time and your health visitor can give advice about a balanced diet for your baby. Keeping any sugar containing foods, snacks and drinks to mealtimes will protect those new teeth from tooth decay. Milk and water are the best drinks between mealtimes; crunchy cucumber and carrot sticks can help ease the discomfort from teething and are safe for teeth as well.

What if your baby needs to suck their thumb? Sucking habits can cause problems with how the teeth grow and the jaws develop as your child gets older. A thumb-sucking habit can be very hard to break and many dentists would advise using a dummy, with a flat orthodontic teat, instead. Most children will be willing trade in their dummy as they get older, less so their thumb!

Finally, bring your little ones along to your dentist from a very early age to get them used to the sights and smells of the practice. Even if they don't co-operate at their first visits it is a valuable opportunity for parents to receive the right advice for their child's age and stage. At Shipston Dental Practice we run a free, informal play session for all under 5s on a Friday afternoon as a relaxed introduction to going to the dentist. Short, fun visits with a ride in the chair and sticker make coming to the dentist a positive experience right from the start.

So give your baby the right start to having a healthy, happy smile for life.