



Mouth and Dental Care for Tube-fed Children

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Many children who are neurologically impaired have feeding problems that make it unsafe for them to eat by mouth and, therefore, are often **not** fed by mouth. Instead, they may use tube-like devices such as:

- gastrostomy (g-tube)
- jejunostomy (j-tube)
- nasogastric tube (ng-tube)

These will prevent feeding problems such as aspiration (choking), pneumonia (infection in the lungs), dehydration, and/or malnutrition. For convenience, the phrases "tube-fed" and "fed by a tube" will be used to describe any or all of these tube-feeding methods.

Children fed by a tube are more likely to have calculus (tartar) build-up, and are not typically as prone to caries (cavities).

Gastro-esophageal reflux

Gastro-esophageal reflux (GER) is a common finding in children who are fed by a tube. The effects of GER may be seen in the child's mouth as erosion of the teeth (thinning or shortening of the teeth). The presence of calculus may decrease or mask the effects of reflux.

Children who are tube-fed may also have a very sensitive mouth. This may make mouth and dental care difficult. To prevent a sensitive mouth,

brush your child's teeth and clean their gums.

How mouth health affects general health

Many children fed by a tube have neuromuscular impairments that cause airway problems and increase the risk of aspiration which may lead to pneumonia.

Poor mouth care and dental problems increase the risk of aspiration pneumonia even more because:

- it increases the number of bacteria in the saliva (spit)
- it increases the number of bad bacteria in the saliva

Good mouth care and dental health will decrease your child's risk of pneumonia while being fed by a tube.

Mouth care

Mouth care should be started by the time your child's first tooth comes in. Wipe your baby's teeth with a face cloth or toothbrush at least twice a day.

When your baby's molars come in, brush them with a soft nylon bristled toothbrush and a very small amount of toothpaste (pea size or smaller) at least twice a day (morning and bedtime).

Dental visits

A dental visit is recommended within six months of the first tooth coming in. During the visit, you will get information and guidelines to help prevent mouth and dental problems in your child.

Regular follow-up (6-12 months) with a family dentist or a pediatric dentist is recommended. This will help:

- prevent mouth and dental problems
- teach mouth care
- provide teeth cleaning and fluoride application, if needed

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