

TEETHING

Parents often think that their babies are teething when they begin drooling and putting their fingers in their mouth, usually when they are around three or four months old.

However, this is often simply a normal developmental milestone and has nothing to do with actual teething. Very often, even when infants have these classic 'teething symptoms,' they will not get their first tooth for a few more months or sometimes not until they are more than a year old. So until you see swollen gums or that first tooth coming in, any other symptoms may just be a coincidence.

TEETHING SYMPTOMS

In addition to drooling, other teething symptoms can include:

- a decreased appetite for solid foods
- biting
- ear rubbing
- gum rubbing
- irritability
- a rash on your child's face
- sucking
- waking up at night

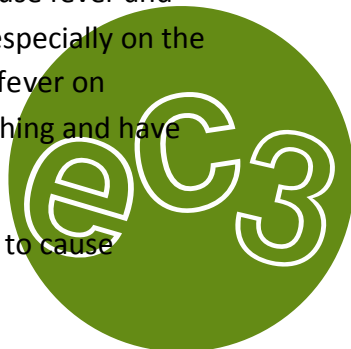
These symptoms occur about 4 days before and up to 3 days after your baby's tooth comes in, although the more bothersome symptoms, including decreased appetite, not sleeping, rash, and ear rubbing are most common on the day the tooth actually erupted or a day or 2 beforehand. That means that teething is not going to last for weeks or months, as some parents believe, unless your child has one tooth after another coming in.

Keep in mind that many experts do believe that teething doesn't cause any symptoms for most children and that 'teething is the scapegoat for many other events occurring between about 6 and 24 months of age.

TEETHING AND FEVER

Does teething cause fever? Most experts will tell you that teething does not cause fever and definitely does not cause a high fever. It may cause a low grade fever though, especially on the day that the tooth actually erupts, but when in doubt, don't blame your child's fever on teething, especially since it could be a coincidence and your child could be teething and have another illness causing the fever.

In addition to a high fever, such as above 102 F, teething is not usually thought to cause diarrhea, a decreased appetite for liquids, other types of rashes, or a cough.



TEETHING AND YOUR CHILD

Although the average pediatrician does not blame many symptoms on teething, if your child has the same symptoms every time he gets a new tooth, then you can likely blame those symptoms on teething, especially if they are fairly mild symptoms and your child otherwise seems well.

When in doubt though, call your pediatrician, especially if your child is waking up, has a fever, or is not eating well. For example, if your child just had a cold, and is now waking up at night, pulling on his ears, is not eating well, and has a fever, then even though you see a tooth coming in, it is more likely that his symptoms are being caused by an ear infection than that tooth.

TREATMENTS FOR TEETHING

Perhaps more important than deciding what treatments to give your teething child is making sure he is actually teething. If you are using drooling as your only teething symptom, then your baby will likely be teething for a long time. Instead, review the other teething symptoms above and only consider a treatment for teething if your child is uncomfortable. Remember that teething can be easy and painless for many children.

If your child is uncomfortable, typical treatments include:

- a teething aid, such as a wet washcloth, teething rings, etc.
- teething biscuits
- massaging or rubbing your baby's gums
- a pain reliever, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen (if your infant is over six months old)

Keep in mind that teething gels and teething tablets are not recommended by many pediatrician and are often overused because parents confuse 'teething symptoms' with other problems such as viral infections, sleeping problems, and ear infections.

If you are frequently using medication to comfort your child who you think is teething, double check with your pediatrician to make sure that there isn't another cause for his symptoms.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- teething is relatively painless for many children
- the first tooth can come in anytime between 3 to 15 months, with an average age of 4 to 7 months for most infants
- if teething does cause symptoms, it is usually about 4 days before and until 3 days after the tooth comes in
- don't blame serious symptoms, especially a high fever or irritability, on teething