

Common teething symptoms in babies



What teething usually feels like for a baby

Primary teeth often begin to erupt around 6 months of age, but timing varies widely. Some babies show a first tooth earlier, while others have no visible teeth until later in the first year. The lower central incisors are often among the first teeth to appear, followed by upper incisors and later molars, but individual patterns differ.

As a tooth moves through the gum, the surrounding tissue may become tender, slightly swollen, or red. Babies cannot describe pressure, soreness, or itching, so they communicate through behavior. They may bring hands to the mouth, rub their gums on toys, bite a spoon, or become unsettled during feeds and bedtime. These changes can be stressful, but they are usually intermittent rather than continuous and severe.

A helpful way to think about teething is that it can make a baby uncomfortable, but it should not make a baby seriously unwell. If the overall picture looks like illness rather than mild oral discomfort, it is safer to consider other causes and seek medical guidance.

Dropoling, chewing, and gum-rubbing

Increased drooling is one of the most familiar teething-associated signs. Drool may soak bibs, irritate the chin, or collect in skin folds around the mouth. Drooling also becomes more noticeable developmentally as babies learn to coordinate oral muscles, so it is not specific to teething, but it commonly appears around the same age.

Chewing and biting are also common. Pressure on the gums may temporarily reduce discomfort, which is why babies often gnaw on teething rings, fingers, fabric, or safe toys. Gum-rubbing, either with their own hand or against an object, is another behavior reported in research on teething symptoms.

Caregivers can support these symptoms with simple, low-risk measures: gently rubbing the gum with a clean finger, offering a firm rubber teething ring, or using a chilled but not frozen teether. Frozen objects can be too hard and may injure delicate gum tissue. Any teething item should be large enough not to choke on, intact, easy to clean, and used with supervision.

Irritability, crying, and sleep disruption

Many babies become more irritable during teething. They may fuss, want to be held more, resist settling, or wake more often. Prospective research has associated teething periods with increased irritability and wakefulness, but these symptoms are usually mild to moderate and time-limited.

It is also important to remember that crying has many causes in infancy. Hunger, tiredness, overstimulation, reflux-like discomfort, wind, a wet nappy, and infection can all overlap with the teething age range. If you are trying to sort out patterns, it may help to consider Common reasons babies cry rather than assuming the mouth is always the source.

Teething discomfort may temporarily disturb normal infant sleep patterns, especially when a baby is lying down and less distracted. Still, teething should not cause inconsolable crying for many hours, a dramatic change in responsiveness, or a baby who cannot be roused normally. Those signs warrant prompt medical advice.

Mild temperature changes versus fever

A mild temperature elevation can occur around tooth eruption. Clinical guidance often describes this as a slightly raised temperature, typically below 38C. This may reflect local inflammation or coincidental minor illness, but it is not the same as a true fever.

Teething is not a good explanation for a high fever, persistent fever, or a baby who appears systemically unwell. Fever in young babies is especially important because infants can become ill quickly and may show subtle signs. If a baby is under 3 months with a temperature of 38C or higher, or any baby has fever with poor feeding, lethargy, breathing difficulty, persistent vomiting, rash that does not blanch, or signs of dehydration, seek urgent medical guidance according to local services.

The practical message is cautious: a warm cheek or a mildly raised temperature may accompany teething, but a clearly febrile or unwell baby needs assessment for infection or another medical cause.

Facial rash, flushed cheeks, and skin irritation

Some babies develop a flushed cheek on the side where a tooth is erupting, or a mild rash around the mouth and chin. This often relates to drool irritating the skin barrier. The area may look pink, damp, or slightly rough, particularly if saliva stays on the skin for long periods.

Gentle skin care can help. Pat the skin dry rather than rubbing, change wet bibs, and consider a thin protective barrier ointment if recommended by your clinician or pharmacist. Avoid fragranced products on irritated infant skin unless advised.

Not every rash during teething is a drool rash. Widespread rash, hives, facial swelling, blistering, purple or non-blanching spots, or rash with fever should not be dismissed. If a rash appears after a new food or medicine, baby allergies symptoms may need consideration, especially if there is vomiting, wheezing, swelling, or sudden worsening.

Feeding changes and appetite

Some babies temporarily eat less solid food during teething. Biting down on a spoon or chewing textured foods may feel uncomfortable, and babies may prefer softer foods for a short period. Breastfeeding or bottle-feeding patterns can also shift, although many babies continue milk feeds normally.

Short-lived reduced interest in solids is usually less concerning than reduced fluid intake. Milk remains the main nutrition source for younger babies, and hydration matters at every age. Watch for fewer wet nappies, very dark urine, dry mouth, no tears when crying, unusual sleepiness, or a sunken fontanelle. These can be signs of dehydration and should prompt medical advice.

If feeding refusal is persistent, painful, associated with vomiting or diarrhea, or accompanied by weight concerns, it should not be attributed to teething without assessment. Mouth ulcers, throat infection, ear infection, reflux, constipation, and other conditions can affect feeding too.

Symptoms often blamed on teething but needing caution

Teething has historically been blamed for many infant symptoms, but evidence and clinical guidance are more conservative. Teething may coincide with infections because babies at this age explore objects with their mouths and are developing immune exposure. Coincidence can make cause and effect hard to judge.

Diarrhea is not usually caused by teething. Loose stools may occur for many reasons, including infection or dietary change.

Vomiting is not a typical teething symptom and should be assessed in context, especially if repeated or forceful.

High fever should not be explained by tooth eruption alone.

Cough, breathing difficulty, or blue lips are not teething symptoms.

Marked lethargy, poor responsiveness, or a weak cry needs urgent attention.

When symptoms are mild and the baby is otherwise alert, feeding reasonably, and having wet nappies, home comfort measures may be enough. When the whole baby seems unwell, teething should move lower on the list of explanations.

Safe ways to comfort teething discomfort

The safest strategies are physical comfort measures rather than medicated or

wearable products. A clean finger used to gently massage the gum can be soothing. A firm teething ring cooled in the refrigerator may provide relief. Extra cuddling, calm routines, and responsive caregiving can also make the period easier.

Be cautious with products that carry avoidable risk. Teething necklaces, bracelets, and anklets can pose choking or strangulation hazards. Numbing gels can be unsafe for infants, particularly if they contain local anesthetics that may be swallowed or absorbed. Homeopathic teething tablets or unregulated remedies may vary in contents and safety. If pain relief medication is being considered, ask a pediatrician, pharmacist, or qualified healthcare professional for age-appropriate advice rather than guessing a dose.

Finally, protect emerging teeth once they arrive. Use infant-appropriate oral hygiene guidance from your dental or medical professional, avoid putting a baby to bed with a bottle of milk or sweet drink, and ask when to arrange a first dental visit according to local recommendations.