

Fact Sheet

Growing your child's healthy beautiful smile starts earlier than you think!

As parents, we all want to give our children the best start in life.

Well did you know that you can have a positive impact on your child's oral and facial development right from birth?

We all know about the many benefits of breast milk. It strengthens our baby's immune system, it provides optimal nutrition, it's the right temperature, it bonds mother and child...But did you know that breastfeeding your child also has a positive impact on your child's growing face and teeth?

Most craniofacial growth takes place in the first 4 years of life and it is the early feeding habits that dictate this pattern. Studies show that breastfeeding helps to develop the muscles of the face, jaw and tongue and assists in establishing a nasal breathing pattern, all of which are essential for proper facial and jaw development. It is the shape of the breast tissue and the way babies place it between the roof of their mouth and their tongue and the peristaltic motions that follow that helps to properly strengthen and develop their face and jaw muscles. Research is beginning to show that babies who are breastfed and have a smooth transition to solids are less likely to have crowding, cross-bites and narrow jaws when they get their adult teeth.

Many mothers cannot breastfeed or they wean their child before 12 months and find that they have no option other than to give their child a bottle. As opposed to the challenge a baby has of working the milk from the breast with suckling motions, the teat of a bottle flows much more quickly and baby has to use its tongue to hold the flow so he can swallow from time to time. This works different muscles of the face and the tongue upon swallowing compared to those exercised during breastfeeding. To help minimise these issues, when feeding from a bottle, it is best to sit baby up, so that they are able to better control the flow of the milk from the teat. Also try to use bottles with teats that are wide, thick, soft and malleable like Pidgeon baby bottles. Once baby is 12 months old, it is best to move them onto a cup as soon as possible.

The introduction of a cup is especially important when children are weaned off the breast or bottle. It has been found, however that the majority of sippy cups on the market and their long term use can also contribute to an improper swallow pattern. We recommend using a normal cup for your child to sip from as often as possible. If you are on the go, instead of a sippy cup, try to use a bottle with a straw.

Normal, healthy swallowing habits during infancy and early childhood sets a pattern for normal facial and tongue muscle function and helps to establish a normal swallow into adulthood.

Babies also need to put things in their mouth for their oral development in their first year of life. We need to encourage our babies to mouth appropriate teething toys that allow them to practice that chewing motion like ARK therapeutic toys which are especially designed for this purpose.

It's wonderful to think that we can begin to help our children grow healthy faces and jaws at such a young age, armed with a few simple tools and a little bit of knowledge.

HEALTHY FACES

- Breastfeeding where possible
- Begin solids at 6 months
- Encourage good mouth play
- Straw drinks over sippy cups
- Use a cup where possible

