



...where nurturing happens

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TEETHING AND BITING

Most breastfeeding babies will at some point attempt biting. Usually, but not always, biting happens during teething. This can be painful for the mother, but it is a behavior that can be stopped if the mother is persistent.

Why do babies bite?

- *Colds or ear infections* can lead babies to bite because it is difficult for them to suck when their noses are congested or their ears hurt. If your baby has difficulty nursing because of nasal congestion, you can try suctioning the nose with a bulb aspirator (or a Nosefrida). Soften the secretions before suctioning by putting a drop or two of breast milk or saline in the baby's nose. Try nursing with your baby's head higher than his or her chest. Walking while nursing is one effective way of doing this with a sick baby. Upright nursing can also help with ear pain. Using a humidifier while your baby is sleeping can also help clear congestion. If your infant is still having difficulty, check with your pediatrician about other treatment options.
- *Distraction during nursing.* Often an older baby, or one who isn't hungry, can get distracted while nursing. A wriggling, pushing, or rolling baby is difficult to nurse and may clamp down on a mother's nipple in order to look at something across the room or to interact with the mother. To prevent a distracted baby from biting, look for signs of distraction or boredom. Try to end the nursing session before your baby gets bored, or at the first signs of boredom. If your baby is wriggling in your lap and pushing away from your breast, this is the time to end the nursing session. Other tactics are to nurse your baby in a dimly-lit, quiet room, or trying to nurse while lying down in bed, rocking, bouncing, or walking.
- *Attention.* Some older babies will bite to get their mother's attention if she is not focusing on them during a nursing session. Paying closer attention might help to prevent the biting and will make you aware of when your baby is about to bite.

Teething is the most common cause of biting. As babies experience discomfort in their gums, they may find sucking uncomfortable. Additionally, they may find it difficult to latch correctly as new teeth cut through the gums. If your baby is biting while nursing, the first thing to do is to make sure that your infant is latched-on correctly. You can also offer a cold washcloth or teether when biting starts. This helps the baby with pain and also sends the message that the nipple is *not* for biting. Another effective method for dealing with biting is simply to stop the nursing session. Take the baby off of the breast; calmly say "No biting. That hurts mama," and stop the feeding. If the baby is still hungry, you may restart the session after a few minutes. Offering the baby a teether during this break can be helpful. Finally, if baby bites down on the nipple and won't let

- go, you should bring the baby very close to your body. This action gently forces the baby to open his or her mouth in order to breathe.

How do I know if my baby is teething?

On average, babies will get their first tooth at around six months. Common teething signs include:

- Fussiness
- Night waking
- Swollen or red gums
- Drooling and coughing
- Drool rash on chin, chest, or neck
- Diarrhea/diaper rash
- Low-grade fever (under 101°)
- Biting

Teething remedies

- Frozen or refrigerated wet washcloth
- Teether toys (cold or room temperature)
- Homeopathic teething tablets or gels
- Ice, frozen breast milk or chamomile tea cubes inside a mesh feeder
- Acetaminophen or ibuprofen (check with your pediatrician before administering these)
- Over-the-counter numbing gels (not recommended for use prior to breastfeeding as they numb a baby's gums and tongue; this can make latching and sucking difficult)

Does teething mean I have to wean?

While many babies bite at some point during the teething process, it is usually a temporary issue that soon goes away. If your baby is latching correctly, you should not be able to feel your baby's teeth (since the tongue covers the lower teeth and gums). It isn't physically possible for a baby to suck and bite at the same time. Teething is not a cue for a mother to wean her baby. In fact, it is possible to continue nursing a baby with teeth for many months.