The Tall Tales of Teething: What you should know about teething symptoms

This truth we know for certain: teething causes teeth.

We all can picture our babies chewing on their fingers and toys and drooling before getting their first tooth. But what other symptoms do incoming primary teeth cause?

Nearly everything in the past has been blamed on teething, including seizures, meningitis, and tetanus. According to an article in *Pediatrics in Review* (April 2009), teething was listed as the official cause of death in about five thousand infants in England in the early 1800s. In France from 1600 to 1900, fifty percent of all infant deaths were blamed on teething!

Numerous studies have tried to identify which symptoms coincide with tooth eruption. Two such studies: http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/content/abstract/106/6/1374 and http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/content/abstract/105/4/747 involved parents and/or daycare teachers. They kept daily checklists of symptoms such as runny nose, diaper rash, crankiness, diarrhea, and fever. Every day caretakers checked for new teeth. Guess what those researchers found? They found little correlation between any single illness symptom and a new tooth.

Despite scientific evidence to the contrary, people still blame teething for numerous maladies.

Here are symptoms which are **NOT** caused by teething that parents should be aware of:

- **Teething does not cause fever over 101 degrees F.** Fever of this height or higher indicates infection somewhere. Maybe a simple viral infection such as a cold, or a more severe infection such

as pneumonia, but parents should NOT assume that their baby's fever over 101 F is caused by teething. These babies could be contagious. Parents should not expose them to others with the false sense of security that they are not spreading germs.

- **Teething does not cause diarrhea severe enough to cause dehydration**. If a child has severe diarrhea, then he most likely has a severe stomach virus or another medical issue.
- **Teething does not cause a cough severe enough to cause increased work of breathing**. Babies make more saliva around four months of age and this increased production does result in an occasional cough. But babies never have breathing problems or a severe cough as a result of teething. Instead, suspect a cough virus or other causes of cough such as asthma.
- **Teething does not cause pain severe enough to cause a change in mental state.**

Some children get crankier as their teeth erupt and cause their gums to swell and redden. But, if parents cannot console their crying/screaming child, the child likely has another, perhaps more serious, cause of pain and needs an evaluation by his or her health care provider.

Just from a logic standpoint, if teething causes symptoms as babies get their primary teeth, shouldn't incoming permanent teeth cause the same symptoms? Yet I've never heard a parent blame teething for a runny nose, rash, cough, fever, or general bad mood in an eight, nine, or ten year old child who is growing permanent teeth.

Maybe these parents are too busy bemoaning the cost of early orthodontal work.

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