

## **How to Win the Battle against Baby Bottle Tooth Decay**

Decay of temporary teeth that often happens to infants and very young babies is often referred to as Baby Bottle Tooth Decay. The tooth decay process is also called caries'. It occurs when a baby's mouth is infected by acid-producing bacteria, which evidence suggests happens due to prolonged exposure of the baby's teeth to foods with natural or added sugar. The bacteria in the mouth use this sugar to produce acids that attack your baby's teeth.

The most common way this happens is when babies are settled to sleep with a bottle of milk, formula or other sweetened drinks. Giving infants sugary drinks while they are napping is harmful because the flow of saliva decreases while they are asleep, allowing the sugary liquids to linger on the child's teeth for extended periods of time.

Baby bottle tooth decay usually happens in the upper front teeth. A dull white band or white spots around the gum line of the teeth are the earliest signs of tooth decay. These spots become yellowish-brown as the decay progresses and eventually blacken as it advances. But they can be hard to see at first, and that's why a dental visit is a must as soon as your baby's first tooth appears.

A child displaying signs of tooth decay needs to be treated at the earliest to stop the decay from spreading and prevent further damage. This is particularly important because the baby's temporary teeth serve as placeholders for their adult teeth. Early loss of the temporary teeth may result in your baby developing poor eating habits, speech problems, and crooked/damaged adult teeth. But all of this can be avoided by the following good oral habits:

- Wipe your baby's gums with a clean , damp gauze pad or washcloth after each feeding
- Try to avoid exchange of saliva through the common use of feeding spoons
- Regularly clean and massage gums in the areas without teeth
- Avoid filling bottles/sippy cups with liquids with added sugar such as flavored milk, juices, soft drinks etc. Only use bottles to feed babies breast milk or formula.
- Never allow the baby to fall asleep with a bottle containing anything but water. If the baby needs milk before a nap, ensure it is finished before your baby goes to bed.
- Do not dip your baby's pacifier in sugary substances
- Monitor your baby's sugar intake and reduce it wherever possible
- Encourage brushing as soon as your baby's first few teeth come in. Use pea sized amounts of fluoride toothpaste, which will help lessen cavities
- Encourage drinking from regular cups once your child is above 12 months old

As soon as your baby's first tooth appears, talk to a pediatrician/dentist about scheduling the first dental visit. Starting early is the key, healthy baby teeth will usually result in healthy permanent teeth. Remember: The mother's oral health and hygiene habits also affects her baby's, so always be disciplined with brushing & flossing between meals and go for regular dental check-ups.



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