

Baby Bottle Tooth Decay

What is baby bottle tooth decay?

Baby bottle tooth decay happens with an infant or toddler takes a bottle filled with sweet juice or formula to bed. The baby's teeth are in constant contact with sugars for a long period of time, and the result is rampant tooth decay at a very young age. The condition is also known as baby bottle mouth syndrome or nursing caries syndrome. The same problem can arise when a young child nurses from the breast for a long stretch of time because breast milk also has sugar in it. Problems arise when parents or babysitters use the bottle or breast as a pacifier to calm a child, or help the baby get to sleep. When the baby's teeth are in continual contact with sugars, and they are not cleaned, the decay process begins.

How does it happen?

As the child sucks, the sugars in the liquids pool around the teeth and create acids that sit on the teeth. Bacteria and acids form a sticky deposit called dental plaque that clings to the teeth. The resulting dental plaque slowly dissolves the tooth structure and causes decay. Baby bottle tooth decay usually starts in the back of the front teeth, and often goes unnoticed by parents because it can't be seen. New teeth are more vulnerable to decay. The good news is that not every child gets decay from prolonged exposure to sweetened liquids. There are genetic factors that make some children more prone to tooth decay at an early age.

How can you prevent baby bottle tooth decay?

The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry provides the following recommendations for avoiding baby bottle tooth decay:

- Don't put a child to sleep with a bottle containing anything but water
- Do not dip the pacifier in anything sweet, such as honey or sugar.
- Advise family members or others who babysit the child about the dangers of putting a child to bed with a bottle.
- Clean the child's teeth by wiping them with a cloth or brushing them after eating or drinking.
- Visit the dentist sometime after the first tooth comes in and the child's first birthday.
- Have the child drinking from a cup by 9 to 12 months old.

Why should a child visit the dentist so early?

The earlier the dental visit, the better chance of preventing dental problems. Children with healthy teeth chew foods easily, learn to speak clearly and smile with confidence. It's important to start your child on a lifetime of good dental habits at an early age.