

Baby Bottle Tooth Decay



The health of a child's baby teeth is extremely important to their overall health and the health of their future permanent teeth as well. Kids need strong baby teeth to speak correctly, chew their food, and eventually for their permanent teeth to grow in properly. It is vitally important to begin good oral care during infancy. It is a parent's responsibility to take control of their child's oral health from the beginning and implement healthy oral hygiene habits to prevent and reduce the risk of dental caries, including baby bottle tooth decay!

What Is Baby Bottle Tooth Decay?

Infant caries is the medical term for tooth decay. When tooth decay occurs in infants and toddlers it is often referred to as, *Baby Bottle Tooth Decay*, Nursing Bottle Caries and Early Childhood Caries. Most often baby bottle tooth decay occurs in the front upper and lower teeth but can also become a problem in any of the other teeth as well.

What Causes Baby Bottle Tooth Decay?

Several different things can cause early childhood caries, but most frequently, perpetual exposure to drinks that have sugar causes tooth decay in infants and toddlers. When a baby is put to sleep with a bottle or when a bottle is used as a pacifier for a cranky baby, tooth decay can develop. When sugar rests on and coats the teeth,

decay transpires more quickly. Infants usually consume too much sugar when they are excessively provided with certain kinds of formula or milk, sweetened snacks, or other sweetened liquids like juice to pacify them or help them fall asleep.

Tooth decay is an oral disease that can even begin when a mother (or primary caregiver) passes cavity-causing bacteria to an infant. The bacteria are transmitted through saliva, so this can occur if a mother shares a spoon with a baby, for example. Also, an infant may be at an increased risk for tooth decay if he/she is not receiving a sufficient amount of fluoride.



Signs And Symptoms Of Baby Bottle Tooth Decay

Caries caused by baby bottle tooth decay can form in any of the baby teeth, but they most commonly occur on the upper front teeth. They appear as uncharacteristic white, dark, or brown spots on the teeth. They may also cause teeth to become more sensitive than usual.

Detriments Of Baby Bottle Tooth Decay

Infant caries can become a very critical issue, and if a tooth is lost too early due to decay or left untreated, infection and pain can ensue. Also, if baby teeth do not develop correctly, due to decay especially, an infant may establish deficient eating habits, experience speech problems, and permanent teeth may “come in” crowded and misaligned. Overall, dental pain, misaligned adult

teeth, chewing pain or problems, and serious infections are all potential complications of baby bottle tooth decay. If decay is severe enough, the dentist may have to even remove baby teeth prematurely, which is not ideal.

Preventing Baby Bottle Tooth Decay

There are many ways to practice good oral hygiene for infants in order to reduce the risk and prevent baby bottle tooth decay:

- Never put a child to bed with a bottle of milk or juice. The sugar in the liquid will stay on the baby's teeth for hours, and eventually start causing decay. If a baby must use a bottle to fall asleep, fill it with water.
- Do not allow a child to carry around a bottle of juice or milk. This forms the bad habit of the baby constantly sucking on a bottle and coating their teeth with sugar.
- Try to never fill bottles with soft drinks, juices, or sugar water.
- By 12 to 14 months of age, the baby should be completely weaned off the bottle feed.
- Do not encourage prolonged pacifier use and never dip a pacifier in syrup or honey. NEVER give honey to a baby under 1 year old for any reason! This can be very harmful.
- Restrict the amount of juice a child consumes and promote healthy eating habits by limiting sweets.
- Make sure to wipe an infant's gums after every feeding with a clean damp washcloth or gauze pad.