

Baby Bottle Tooth Decay

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Baby teeth begin to form before the baby is even born! The first baby tooth can appear anywhere between four and fourteen months of age, and the last baby tooth is usually in by the age of two years.

It is very important to take care of all the baby teeth. Starting good dental hygiene when the first tooth erupts creates healthy habits and also makes sure both the baby and the permanent teeth stay healthy.

Baby bottle tooth decay is caused when infants and children sleep with a bottle containing anything but water or if they are using the bottle as a pacifier during the day (if they have the bottle in their mouth all the time). Tooth decay can happen if you put your baby to bed with a bottle of formula, milk, juice, soft drinks, sugar water, sugared drinks, etc. Allowing your baby to suck on a bottle for longer than a mealtime can also cause tooth decay. Pacifiers dipped in anything sweet (sugar or honey) are just as bad.

When a child is sleeping, liquids remain in the mouth and pool around the gums and teeth. Sugars in the liquid combine with normal bacteria and germs in the mouth and form acid. The acid dissolves the enamel of the teeth (especially the upper front teeth). This causes tooth decay. Since the enamel in baby teeth is not that strong, baby teeth are very susceptible to decay, and it does not take long to happen.

Baby bottle tooth decay can cause severe damage to your child's baby teeth and can even cause dental problems in the permanent teeth. The baby teeth can be so damaged that they need to be covered with silver crowns and or need a root canal. If the damage is very bad, it will go through to the permanent teeth, causing them to decay and also possibly to require a crown or root canal.

You can, however, prevent baby bottle tooth decay. Here is what I would like all parents to do:

1. Be responsible for your child's health and well being. Tell grandparents, family members, and all of your child's care givers about the danger of letting your child sleep with bottles and of giving them sweetened pacifiers.
2. Never put your child to bed with a bottle. By seven or eight months of age, most children do not need to have a bottle during the night. If your child is used to getting a bottle at night, you need to be consistent and not give one! It may take seven to ten sleepless nights for your child to accept that he or she will not be getting a bottle at bedtime and to learn to go to sleep without it. If for some reason you feel you still need to give your child a bottle at night, use only plain water.
3. You should wean your baby off the bottle by 12 months of age. Start giving your baby water out of a sippy cup at around 10 months, and once the child gets the hang of it, start putting ALL liquids in the sippy cup instead of the bottle.
4. Never put juice or other sweet liquids in the bottle. Use the bottle only for formula or breast milk.
5. Give your baby a bottle only during meal times. Do not use the bottle as a pacifier. Do not let your child walk around with it or drink from it for extended periods of time.
6. When you stop giving formula or stop breast feeding and switch to whole milk (usually at 12 months of age), put the whole milk in a sippy cup instead of a

bottle. Your child may initially refuse to take large amounts of milk from the sippy cup, but eventually that will change. It is okay if your child doesn't drink as much milk for a few weeks. You can serve yogurt or cheese instead.

7. Gently brush your baby's teeth and gums with a soft infant toothbrush and water two times a day.

Having healthy teeth is an important part of your child's overall health. I hope you follow these guidelines, and if you have any questions, please call me or ask me during your next visit.