

# Early Childhood Caries

Parents

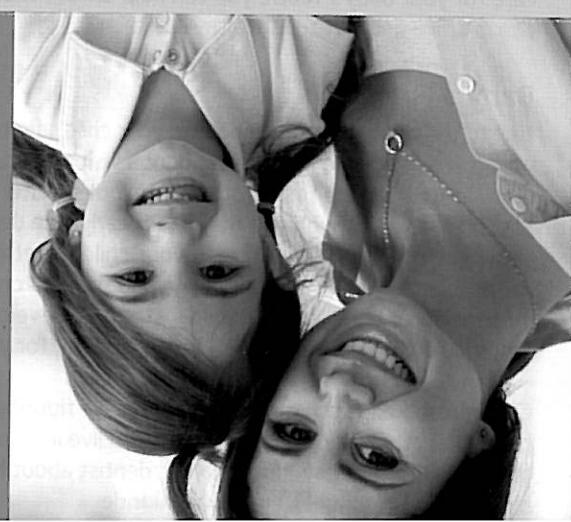
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Keeping baby teeth healthy is important for chewing, speaking and appearance. But did you know that a baby's teeth are at risk for decay (caries) as soon as they appear? The good news is that it's easy to prevent Early Childhood Caries and keep baby teeth healthy.



## A Sugary Culprit

Early Childhood Caries can destroy the teeth of an infant or young child. Caries are caused when the child's teeth are exposed to sugary liquids often. These include milk (including breast milk), formula, fruit juice and other sweetened liquids. If sugary drinks are around the teeth for long periods of time, they can cause tooth decay.

## Plaque Attack

A thin, sticky film called plaque covers teeth. Bacteria in plaque use sugar to produce acid. The acid attacks tooth enamel. If sugary foods or liquids are allowed to remain in the mouth, acid can attack teeth for several minutes. Tooth decay can occur after frequent, repeated acid attacks.

## Bottles and Training Cups Between Meals

What matters is not just *what* children drink, but *how*

*often* and for *how long* their teeth are exposed to decay-producing acids. For example, if you allow a child to fall asleep with a bottle during a nap or at nighttime, sugars remain around the teeth and provide fuel for acid attacks. In the same way, if you offer a bottle or a training cup of sugary liquid as a pacifier many times a day, you increase the number of acid attacks.

## Keeping Your Child's Mouth Clean

After each feeding, wipe the baby's gums with a clean, damp gauze pad or washcloth. This will remove plaque and bits of food that can harm erupting teeth. When your child's teeth begin to erupt, brush them gently with a child's size toothbrush and water. (Consult with your child's dentist or physician if you are considering using fluoride toothpaste before age two.) By spending a few minutes each day to care for your baby's teeth, you can help ensure that your child's smile gets off to a healthy start.

## Baby's First Visit

Talk to the dentist about scheduling your child's first dental visit. It is a good idea for the first dental visit to occur within six months after the first tooth erupts, but no later than the first birthday. Although this may seem early, the dentist can show you how to properly clean your child's teeth, check for problems such as dental decay, and provide oral health information based on your child's stage of development. You should consider this a "well-baby checkup" for your child. Children should receive an optimal level of fluoride to help prevent tooth decay. Whether or not you live in a community that has fluoridated water, ask your dentist about how your child can get the right amount of fluoride.



Healthy Primary (Baby) Teeth



Mild Decay



Mild To Severe Decay



Severe Decay

## What You Can Do

You can play an active role in caring for your child's teeth and preventing decay:

- Avoid having your child get used to sugary drinks and foods as a reward, snack or regular part of the daily diet.
- Don't dip pacifiers in a sweet liquid or add sugar to a baby's food to make it taste better.
- Rinse pacifiers with water, not with your own mouth.
- Don't use a nursing bottle or training cup filled with sugary liquids as a pacifier.
- Encourage your child to drink from a cup by the first birthday.
- If your child is thirsty between meals, use only water in the bottle or cup.