Baby Bottle Tooth Decay

Proper dental care is a lifelong commitment that starts even before your baby's first tooth forms. While daily cleanings and fluoride are important, they alone may not prevent Baby Bottle Tooth Decay (BBTD), a major cause of tooth decay in infants. Baby Bottle Tooth Decay is costly to treat. If left untreated it can quickly destroy the infant's four upper front teeth and lower back teeth by the age of three. It can also lead to pain, infection, early loss of baby teeth, crooked permanent teeth and an increased risk of decay in permanent teeth.

Why Are Baby Teeth Important?

Many parents assume that decay does not matter in baby teeth because the teeth will fall out anyway, but decay in baby teeth poses risks. If your child loses his or her baby teeth too early because of decay or infection, the permanent teeth will not be ready to replace them yet. Baby teeth act as a guide for the permanent teeth. If baby teeth are lost too early, the teeth that are left may shift position to fill in the gaps. This may not leave any room for the permanent teeth to come in.

How Does Baby Bottle Tooth Decay Develop?

A baby’s teeth can suffer real damage if the baby is put to bed with a bottle filled with sugary liquids like milk formula, fruit juices, soda pop, jello or sugar water, and other sweetened liquids.

During the day, the baby swallows these drinks quickly, so they do not stay on the teeth. But during naps and at bedtime, the practice of putting a baby to bed with a bottle, which the baby can suck on for hours, is the major cause of this dental condition. The sugary liquid flows over the baby's upper front teeth and dissolves the enamel, causing decay that can lead to infection. The longer the practice continues, the greater the damage to the baby's teeth and mouth. Even milk can become harmful when it stays in the mouth for any length of time during sleep.

Don’t let this happen to your baby!
Stop Baby Bottle Tooth Decay, the early decay of baby teeth!
What can you do to prevent bottle mouth?

The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry has developed the following guidelines for preventing baby bottle tooth decay:

• Feed your baby before putting him or her to bed.

• Never put your baby to bed with a bottle. By 7 or 8 months of age, most children no longer need feedings during the night. Children who drink bottles while lying down also may be more prone to getting ear infections. Don't allow a child to fall asleep with a bottle containing milk, formula, fruit juices, or other sweet liquids.

• Only give your baby a bottle during meals. Do not use the bottle as a pacifier; do not allow your child to walk around with it or to drink it for extended periods. These practices not only may lead to BBTD, but children can suffer tooth injuries if they fall while sucking on a bottle.

• Teach your child to drink from a cup as soon as possible, usually by 1 year of age. Drinking from a cup does not cause the liquid to collect around the teeth, and a cup cannot be taken to bed. If you are concerned that a cup may be messier than a bottle, especially when you are away from home, use one that has a snap-on lid with a straw or a special valve to prevent spilling.

• If your child must have a bottle for long periods, fill it only with water.

• Keeping your baby's mouth clean is also important in preventing tooth decay. After feedings, gently brush your baby's gums and any baby teeth with a soft infant toothbrush. Start using water and a soft child-sized toothbrush for daily cleaning once your child has seven to eight teeth.

• Begin using fluoride toothpaste when you are sure the toothpaste will not be swallowed (usually when your child is around 3 years of age). Use a pea-sized amount of toothpaste to limit the amount your child can swallow. Too much fluoride can be harmful to a child. (By the time your toddler is 2 years of age, you should be brushing his or her teeth once or twice a day, preferably after breakfast and before bedtime.)

• See that your child visits the dentist before the age of two and then at least each year for check-ups. Almost half of all children have cavities by the time they are age two.