Fight Away Baby Bottle Decay

It's never too early to teach children about the importance of dental hygiene. In fact, parents should help with healthy habits from birth to avoid common oral health problems that can plague children for decades.

Fussy babies are often comforted by their bottles and pacifiers, but did you know that what's in the bottle may contribute to tooth decay? Infants may suffer from early childhood caries (cavities), commonly known as baby bottle tooth decay.[1] This is primarily caused by frequent, prolonged exposure of baby's teeth to drinks that contain sugar. Milk, including breast milk, juice drinks and formula contain sugars that can contribute to decay, so if you send your child to sleep with a bottle, fill it only with water.

Although a baby's teeth are temporary, they are still at risk of developing cavities.[1] Parents should wipe a baby's gums with a clean, damp washcloth after each feeding during infancy and schedule routine dental visits within six months of the first tooth appearing, or by the child's first birthday.

Did you know?

Even though you don't see them, all 20 primary baby teeth are present in the jaws at birth.

Quick bites

- Avoid sharing saliva with your baby through common feeding spoons or licking pacifiers. This can transfer germs (bacteria) that cause tooth decay.
- After each feeding, wipe your child's gums with a clean, damp washcloth.
- Only provide your child with a clean pacifier—don't dip it in sugar or honey.
- Visit the dentist within six months of your child's first tooth appearing or by the first birthday.
- When your child's teeth come in, brush them gently with a smear of fluoride toothpaste on a child-sized soft toothbrush until age 3.

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1 American Dental Association, "Baby Bottle Tooth Decay," web.

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