
DENTAL HEALTH FACT SHEET

BABY BOTTLE TOOTH DECAY

WHAT IS BABY BOTTLE TOOTH DECAY?

Baby Bottle Tooth Decay (also known as Nursing Bottle Mouth) is severe tooth decay on primary (baby) teeth that begins in infants and young children under three years of age. The condition causes unnecessary suffering among young children and creates serious oral health problems for their future.

WHAT TEETH ARE AFFECTED BY DECAY?

The teeth most likely to be damaged are the upper front teeth, but other teeth may also be affected. The decay starts as small, difficult to see, soft dark spots on the back, sides, and/or front portions of the teeth. Baby Bottle Tooth Decay may quickly become so severe that pieces of the crowns or biting parts of the teeth may fracture, eventually leaving only the roots of the teeth. In some cases the cost to treat this condition may be over \$2,000.

WHAT CAUSES BABY BOTTLE TOOTH DECAY?

Baby Bottle Tooth Decay develops when a child's teeth are exposed to liquids containing sugar for long periods of time. MILK and NATURAL FRUIT JUICES contain sugars that can cause Baby Bottle Tooth Decay. Other liquids such as formula and sweetened liquids (soft drinks, Hi-C, Kool-Aid, maple syrup, Karo syrup, or honey in water) contain high amounts of sugar that can cause Baby Bottle Tooth Decay. A baby given a bottle with any of these liquids is at risk to Baby Bottle Tooth Decay if:

- The bottle is used as a pacifier during the day or before falling asleep for a nap.
- The bottle is given to the baby at bedtime.

HOW DO TEETH DECAY SO RAPIDLY?

The milk or other liquid drips into the child's mouth continuously. The tongue usually protects the lower teeth, but also causes the liquid to pool up and sit on the top teeth. The effect is comparable to a child going to bed with a mouthful of candy and holding that candy on the teeth all night long.

Certain forms of bacteria stick to tooth surfaces and form a colorless film of dental plaque. The plaque uses the sugars in the liquids to produce acids, which rapidly cause tooth decay.

HOW COMMON IS BABY BOTTLE TOOTH DECAY?

It is not known how many children have this disease, but several studies have shown that one in ten children may be affected. According to the studies, in certain populations Baby Bottle Tooth Decay has been found in half the children. Studies have shown that two out of three parents whose children had Baby Bottle Tooth Decay didn't know why their children were suffering from such extensive dental decay.

HOW CAN BABY BOTTLE TOOTH DECAY BE PREVENTED?

By the time the decay is noticed, it may be too late to save the child's teeth. Therefore, to protect your child's teeth from the time they first appear, it is important for you or the person caring for your baby to know about proper bottle-feeding practices. To prevent Baby Bottle Tooth Decay, follow these prevention measures:

- If your baby requires a bottle at bedtime for comfort, use only plain water. Do not fill the bottle with milk, formula, fruit juice, syrup, or any other sweetened liquids such as soft drinks. All these liquids contain various forms of sugar.
- If you use a pacifier to comfort your child, use a clean pacifier - one that is recommended by your baby's doctor. **Never** dip the pacifier in any sweet substance.
- Because fluoride is the most effective agent available to prevent tooth decay, be sure your child receives the proper amount. If your child's drinking water is fluoridated, encourage your child to drink it. If your child's drinking water is not fluoridated, ask your family dentist or doctor about prescribing daily fluoride supplements in the form of drops or tablets.
- After each feeding, gently clean your baby's gums and teeth with a damp cloth or gauze. Gently brush the child's teeth with a soft toothbrush at least once a day. The best time is before bedtime. Use a very small amount (pea-size) of fluoridated toothpaste with older children.
- Many dentists prefer to see children as early as one year of age for appropriate oral health supervision. Possible services include:
 - examination
 - oral health risk assessment
 - education and guidance for parents concerning fluoride supplementation, appropriate use of dental sealants, oral development, sucking habits, bottle use, tooth eruption, tooth cleaning, injury prevention, and dietary habits

FACT:

A combination of proper infant feeding, adequate fluoride intake, timely dental sealant application, good oral hygiene and nutrition, and regular preventive dental visits can result in decay-free children.