



While most babies don't start getting teeth until they are 6 months old, infant dental care is important from the very beginning. And, even though your child's first teeth are temporary, they are still at risk to decay and infection. In infants, tooth decay, or cavities, is commonly referred to as baby bottle tooth decay.

WHAT CAUSES BABY BOTTLE TOOTH DECAY?

Tooth decay in infants and toddlers most commonly occurs when they are put to bed with a bottle that contains milk, formula, or fruit juice. These sugary drinks pool around the teeth for long periods of time as your baby sleeps, allowing acids to easily attach to teeth. This harmful process damages the tooth enamel and leads to cavities. Children whose pacifiers are dipped in a sweet substance are at increased risk. Also, children who are not getting enough fluoride can also suffer from tooth decay.

HOW CAN I PREVENT BABY BOTTLE TOOTH DECAY?

Fortunately, baby bottle tooth decay is very preventable. Here are a few tips to help your child avoid tooth decay:

- Don't send your child to bed with a bottle and never allow your baby or toddler to fall asleep with a bottle that contains fruit juice, formula, milk, or other sweetened liquids
- Make sure your child's pacifier is clean and don't dip it in honey or sugar
- Don't share saliva with your child through feeding spoons or licking pacifiers as this can transfer disease-causing bacteria from you to your child
- Before teeth have erupted, clean your baby's gums and teeth by rubbing a clean, damp washcloth along the baby's upper and lower gums
- When your baby has 1-2 teeth, begin to brush them twice a day with a soft-bristled toothbrush and toothpaste specially formulated for young children
- Encourage your child to drink from a cup before his or her first birthday
- Promote healthy eating and drinking habits
- Visit a dentist when the first tooth appears

LEARNING TO BRUSH TEETH: A PARTNER APPROACH

Kids love to mimic their parents. Let your toddler watch you brush your teeth and then help your little one brush by guiding his or her hand. Continue to supervise your child's brushing until the age of 6, following the guidelines below:

- For children younger than 3 years, begin brushing teeth as they come in using a soft-bristled toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste. Use no more than a smear or an amount the size of a grain of rice. Take care that your child doesn't swallow the toothpaste.
- For children 3 to 6 years of age, use a pea-sized dab of toothpaste on a soft-bristled toothbrush and brush morning and night. Supervise children's brushing and remind them not to swallow the toothpaste. First, brush the inside surfaces of all teeth, where plaque accumulates most. Angle bristles toward the gumline. Brush gently back and forth.
- Next, clean all outside surfaces of teeth. Angle bristles toward the gumline. Brush gently back and forth.
- Last, place brush on the chewing surfaces of the teeth. Brush gently back and forth.

THE RIGHT WAY TO BRUSH



Clean the outer surfaces of your upper teeth, then your lower teeth by brushing away from the gumline

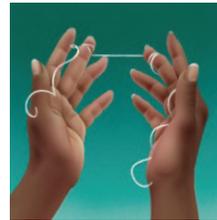


Clean the inside and chewing surfaces of your upper teeth, then your lower teeth using short back-and-forth strokes



Gently brush your tongue to remove bacteria and freshen breath

THE RIGHT WAY TO FLOSS



Use about 18 inches of floss, wrap around middle fingers, leaving an inch or 2 to work with



Holding floss taut, gently slide up and down between your teeth



Follow the curve of each tooth, making sure to go beneath the gumline, but never snapping the floss against the gums

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