

Baby Bottle Syndrome

What is Baby Bottle Syndrome?

Baby bottle syndrome refers to tooth decay occurring when liquids containing sugar remain in your baby's mouth for a long period of time - usually from being put to bed with a bottle of milk, formula, or juice. It can also happen with pacifiers that have been dipped into sweet liquids such as honey or syrup. Breast-fed babies allowed to remain at the breast for extended periods may develop a similar condition called nursing caries. What seems like harmless healthy food can turn into destructive acid by the oral bacteria in the child's mouth and cause cavities (tooth decay). The most common teeth to be affected are the upper anterior (front) teeth since they are some of the first teeth to erupt and therefore have longer exposure to the acid from the sugar.

What should I do to avoid Baby Bottle Syndrome in my baby's teeth?

- > Parents should use damp gauze to wipe a sleeping child's teeth and gums, and brush the teeth daily from the time the first tooth erupts. This will help to remove the harmful bacteria that change the sugars to acid.
- > Use the bottle for nutrition only, not as a routine. Do not allow a child to fall asleep with milk, breast milk, or formula in their mouths.
- > Give your child water when he/she is thirsty.
- > Wean your baby from the bottle to a cup by the age of one year. You can dilute or water down the liquids gradually over time until there is only water in the bottle.
- > Have your dental hygienist or dentist look at your baby's teeth regularly from the time the first tooth erupts. This brief look can be combined with the parent's check-up appointment.

How do I recognize Baby Bottle Syndrome?

Parents should make a habit of examining their child's teeth on a regular basis because, by the time it becomes obvious, it might be too late. Look for spots that don't brush off along the gum line of the front teeth. Also pay attention to signs of sensitivity, discomfort, or pain when the child eats food that is cold or sweet.

Complications of Baby Bottle Syndrome

Extreme situations may involve the pulp (nerve) of the tooth causing pain. The child may need to undergo a special treatment to remove the pulp, crowns may be needed to replace the decayed tooth structure, or extraction (removal) of the front teeth may be necessary. This may affect the eruption of the permanent teeth, the child's self-esteem, and/or speech patterns.



Although it is recommended that children not be put to sleep with a bottle of any kind, if they must have a bottle at night, it should contain nothing more than pure water, or some other liquid containing no sugar and that is neutral in pH.