

PEDIATRIC SERIES

# BabyBottleTooth Decay

## Understanding baby bottle tooth decay

Baby bottle tooth decay, also called bottle syndrome or early childhood caries, is a serious condition that can destroy your child's teeth. It occurs when teeth are exposed, frequently and at length, to liquids that contain sugar. The liquid provides food for the bacteria in plaque, a sticky film that forms constantly on the teeth. When bacteria consume the sugar, they produce acid, and this acid attacks your child's teeth, causing decay.

Your child's teeth are vulnerable to decay from the moment they break through the gums. You may not even notice the decay until it's too late to save the teeth, so it's crucial that you prevent baby bottle tooth decay from occurring in the first place.



Severe damage



At bedtime, use water only



Clean teeth after each feeding

## Why is this condition serious?

Baby bottle tooth decay can lead to toothaches, which can make it difficult for your child to eat. Left untreated, the decay can also cause infection, which may result in our having to remove teeth. If baby teeth are lost too early, your child could suffer from poor nutrition, speech problems, crooked teeth, and permanent damage to adult teeth.

## Which liquids cause decay?

All liquids that contain sugar can cause baby bottle tooth decay. This includes breast and cow's milk (which contain the sugar lactose), formula, fruit juice (which contains the sugar fructose), as well as soda pop and other sweetened drinks.

## How can decay be prevented?

**Begin cleaning your child's teeth as soon as they erupt**, by wiping teeth and gums with a clean, damp washcloth or a very soft infant toothbrush after each feeding.

**If your child takes a bottle to bed**, or needs the comfort of a bottle for long periods during the day, put only water in the bottle, or switch to a pacifier.

**Use a sippy-cup only at mealtime**, or put water in the cup between meals.

**Begin flossing your child's teeth daily** when all primary teeth have come in, usually around age two or two and a half.

**Bring your child in to see us every six months**, beginning when the first tooth erupts.

**Find out if your local water supply contains fluoride.** If it doesn't, we may prescribe fluoride supplements.

Promoting good oral hygiene when your child is young can prevent baby bottle tooth decay and promote good dental habits that will last a lifetime.