



Bright Little Smiles

Avoid baby bottle tooth decay

A lifetime of healthy teeth starts early. Even before his or her first steps, your baby can suffer from **baby bottle tooth decay**, a common problem caused by putting your child to sleep with milk, formula or juice.

The sugars in these liquids encourage the growth of plaque-causing bacteria, which can cause lifelong dental health issues.

- > Decay on the upper front teeth
- > Teeth that need to be pulled
- > Crooked or damaged adult teeth
- > Poor eating habits
- > Speech problems

HEALTHY TEETH START EARLY

Prevent baby bottle tooth decay with these tips:

- > **Wipe your baby's gums.** Use a clean piece of gauze or a washcloth after each feeding.
- > **Clean your baby's teeth early.** It's best to start as soon as the first tooth begins to appear.
- > **Wean your toddler off the bottle.** Children should drink all liquids from a cup by the time they are about 12 months of age.
- > **Don't put your child to bed with a bottle.** The only liquid your child should drink before bed is plain water.
- > **Visit a dentist.** Your baby's first dentist visit should be between 6 and 12 months.

KNOW THE CULPRITS

- > Bottles containing milk, formula, fruit juice or soda
- > Pacifiers dipped in honey, milk, juice, sugar water or anything sweet
- > Prolonged feeding, even breastfeeding

MAKING CHANGES

Talk to your pediatrician to determine exactly what kind of changes are best to wean your baby off the bottle. You can discuss:

- > Gradually diluting bottles with water over two or three weeks
- > Only providing water in your child's bottle during bedtime
- > Substituting a dentist-recommended pacifier instead of a bottle at bedtime

BOTTLE-LESS BEDTIME

Try these tips for getting to bed without a bottle:

- > Sing or play quiet music.
- > Share a story aloud.
- > Use a soft blanket or teddy bear.
- > Put your baby to bed awake to help him or her settle down alone.
- > Gently rock your baby or pat his or her back.

MAKE HEALTHY SMILES FUN

Grin! for Kids is a free kid-friendly resource from Delta Dental. With wacky tooth trivia, jokes and craft projects you can do together, this printable magazine offers a lively approach to learning about dental health for children K-5.

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