



The
Rotunda Hospital
DUBLIN

PARENT FACTSHEET

BABY BOTTLE TOOTH DECAY

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What is baby bottle tooth decay?

Baby bottle tooth decay, also known as early childhood caries, is when cavities or decay form in baby teeth. Decay develops when a child's teeth and gums are in prolonged contact with almost any liquid other than water - such as formula, milk (including breast milk), juice, soft drinks, sugared water, etc. This happens because the sugars found in those liquids (natural or added) are changed to acid by germs in the mouth. The acid then starts to dissolve the teeth, especially the upper front teeth, causing them to decay. The longer those liquids are in contact with the teeth and gums, the more acid the bacteria produce and the more damaged the teeth become. The damage can be very severe but it is entirely preventable.

Are baby teeth even important? Aren't they just going to fall out anyway?

Many people think that decay in baby teeth doesn't matter because those teeth are going to fall out, but it is very important and can have lasting consequences.

1. Guide for permanent teeth: Baby teeth act as guides for the permanent teeth when they come in. If your child loses her baby teeth too early due to decay or infection, the teeth that are left may shift positions in her mouth to fill the gaps. This may not leave enough room for the permanent teeth, which can become over crowded and crooked.
2. Sources of infection: Decayed teeth are a possible source of infection. Some children develop such bad tooth decay that they need dental surgery, under general anaesthesia, to remove the decayed teeth.
3. Source of pain: If your child's teeth are causing her pain, she may avoid eating solid foods and may even avoid talking if it hurts. This can interfere with her getting proper nutrition and with her reaching her developmental milestones. Plus, it is a completely avoidable source of pain for your child!

How can I tell if my child has baby bottle tooth decay?

Baby bottle tooth decay first shows up as white spots on the upper front teeth, which can be hard to see. If you are concerned or think your child may have baby bottle tooth decay, bring her to the dentist for a careful exam. Early treatment to stop the decay from spreading is important to prevent lasting damage.

Good dental hygiene is important for your child's overall health and development. Getting into good habits early can help ensure that she has a lifetime of healthy smiles!

10 TIPS TO PREVENT BABY BOTTLE TOOTH DECAY

Good dental care begins before your baby is even born. Improving your own dental hygiene is the first step to preventing tooth decay in your baby.

1. Germs are present everywhere in the environment. We can't completely avoid them, but we can decrease our exposure. As children spend the majority of their time with their parents, they are constantly exposed to any germs the parents have. That's why it's very important for you to take care of your own teeth. Not only are you modelling good behaviour for your child, you are also decreasing the number of germs your child is exposed

to from your own mouth. Just as washing your hands is important in preventing the spread of germs that cause infections, so is cleaning your teeth. Remember to visit the dentist regularly for a cleaning and check up and to brush your teeth at least twice a day.

2. Avoid letting your baby sleep with a bottle of formula or your breast in her mouth. The constant source of natural sugar provides food for the acid producing germs and can be very damaging to her developing teeth. After feeding, remove the bottle or take her off of the breast. They should not remain in her mouth while she sleeps.

3. Only give your baby a bottle during meals. Do not use the bottle as a pacifier or allow your child to walk around with it. This puts her at risk for baby bottle tooth decay, as the germs love the constant source of natural sugars. She also risks injury if she falls while sucking on the bottle.

4. Never dip pacifiers in sugar, honey or any other substance.

5. Teach your child to drink from a cup as soon as it is practical. Liquid will not collect around the teeth as much as with a bottle and it is more difficult to walk around with a cup or to bring it to bed. Introduce your child to a cup when she is about 6 months old. By the time she is 1 year, she should be drinking only out of the cup and no longer using a bottle.

6. If your child must have a bottle for a prolonged period of time, fill it only with water. (Small babies should not take more than an ounce or two of water as their kidneys are not mature yet)

7. Limit the amount of pure fruit juice your child drinks to one *small* cup per day, preferably diluted with water. Juice has lots of natural sugars, limited health benefits, tends to fill children up so they don't eat a balanced diet, is very often consumed in excess and can even cause diarrhoea. Unless they are constipated, children under 6 months should not drink juice.

8. Don't give you child sugary drinks like flavoured milks, juice drinks or sodas.

9. After feeding, gently clean your baby's gums and teeth with an infant toothbrush or clean cloth and water. Once she has 7 or 8 teeth, a soft child sized toothbrush can be used for daily cleanings. Most tap water in Ireland is fluoridated. Fluoride toothpaste should not be used in children under 2 years because they tend to swallow it rather than spit it out. Once your child is about 2 years, you can help her brush her teeth with a *small* amount of fluoride toothpaste. Fluoride is very effective at preventing cavities but too much can actually damage teeth. If you have well-water that does not contain fluoride ask your GP if your baby needs fluoride drops.

10. Bring your toddler to the dentist for regular check ups and to discuss proper cleaning techniques.

PLEASE DISCUSS ANY QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS YOU HAVE WITH YOUR CHILD'S DOCTOR OR NURSE