



Examples of Healthy Teeth and Early Childhood Caries (or Baby Bottle Tooth Decay)

Photograph of healthy teeth



Photographs below show teeth with mild to severe cases of early childhood caries



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6

Preventing Tooth Decay

Baby bottle tooth decay, or early childhood caries, can occur when:

- Babies with teeth are regularly allowed to fall asleep with a bottle in their mouths. Less saliva is made in the mouth when a baby falls asleep, and liquid from the bottle can pool around the teeth.
- Babies are allowed to drink from a bottle (containing juice, sweet liquids, or formula) for long periods.

The sugar in juice, sweet liquids, and formula are used by bacteria in the mouth to produce acids which can cause serious tooth decay. See the photographs on the opposite page of healthy teeth and teeth with baby bottle tooth decay. To prevent tooth decay in babies:

- Feed only breastmilk or formula from a bottle.
- Do not feed juice from a bottle.
- Offer the bottle only at feeding time, not at nap time. If a baby falls asleep during feeding, move the baby around a bit to stimulate swallowing before putting the baby down to sleep.
- Do not leave a bottle in a baby's crib or playpen or prop bottles.
- Only give a baby a plain clean pacifier. Never give a baby a pacifier dipped in honey, syrup, sugar, or other sweet substance.
- Do not put water sweetened with honey, sugar, or corn syrup; soda pop; sweetened iced tea; sports drinks; sweetened gelatin water; juice drinks; or other sweetened drinks in the bottle or cup.
- Do not use a bottle of cold juice to soothe a teething baby's gums. Instead, offer a clean favorite rattle or teething ring that has been cooled in the refrigerator (not the freezer).
- Provide juice only in a cup (do not feed more than 4 ounces of fruit juice per day).
- Do not let a baby carry around and continuously drink from a bottle or sippy cup.
- Do not feed a baby sweetened foods, such as lollipops, sweet candies, candy bars, cookies, cakes, or sweetened cereals, or sticky sweet foods such as dried fruit.
- Gradually begin shifting bottle feedings to cup feedings any time between 6 and 12 months of age as the baby consumes more solid foods and drinks liquids from a cup. It is best to wean babies from a bottle to a cup by about 12 to 14 months of age.

Discuss the topic of cleaning the baby's gums and teeth with each baby's parents; they can consult with the baby's doctor about this subject.