



Baby Bottle Tooth Decay

Every year thousands of infants and young children suffer from extensive tooth decay. Surprisingly, the major culprits are milk and other liquids from the baby's bottle.

Just like an adult's mouth, a baby's mouth is full of bacteria. These bacteria feed on sugars found in the liquids we drink and in the foods we eat. Ungrateful hosts, these bacteria produce acid as a by-product of their feasting. It is this acid which attacks the tooth enamel and causes cavities.

Many parents put their children to sleep with a bottle. They often find that this helps the baby settle down. Unfortunately, studies show that babies fall asleep with the baby bottle nipples in their mouths, allowing fluid from the bottle to pool around teeth. Sugar present in the fluid continually nourishes the bacteria that are in the baby's mouth. Using this constant source of sugar, bacteria multiply and create a steady stream of tooth damaging acid. Night after night of acid attack results in cavity formation and extensive tooth decay. In some cases, the entire tooth can be eaten away by bacterially produced acid. It is especially important to be vigilant against baby bottle tooth decay because baby teeth are more susceptible to tooth decay than adult teeth.

Additionally, constant sugar in the mouth can lead to a build-up of bacteria to a point where more harmful types of bacteria start becoming predominant. These bacteria cause gingivitis by invading gum tissue and releasing toxins. In severe cases, the bacteria and their toxins can attack bone structures supporting the teeth (periodontal disease) resulting in permanent damage.

What can parents do to protect their children's teeth? We suggest that after every bottle feeding you take a wet cloth or gauze pad and gently wipe your child's gums and teeth. This will remove any bacteria containing plaque and excess sugar that may have built up.

What liquid should you put in your baby's bedtime bottle? Natural juices such as grape juice or apple juice contain natural sugars which bacteria can use to create acids. Milk contains a sugar called lactose which bacteria can also use to create acid. If you give your child a bedtime bottle, the liquid of choice inside of the baby's bottle is water. Water contains no sugar and can not be used by bacteria to produce acid.

Finally, never give your baby a pacifier dipped in any type of substance containing large amounts of sugar. Many parents, for example, give their children pacifiers dipped in honey. This can be very bad for the baby's teeth.

When you protect your child from baby bottle tooth decay you ensure that their smile will last a lifetime.