

Caring for those original precious teeth

Healthy children have healthy teeth. Healthy teeth are important for eating, speech and appearance.

Research even shows there may be a relationship between oral disease and diabetes, heart disease, stroke, as well as premature and low birth-weight babies.

You may have noticed increased advertising this month about the importance of caring for teeth and gums. These friendly reminders are sponsored by Canadian Dental Association.

April is National Oral Health Month and dentists all over Canada are urging people of all ages to practise good oral hygiene and to have your mouth examined by your dentist regularly.

Good dental hygiene begins at birth. Although we tend to think only sticky foods can cause tooth decay, putting a baby down to sleep with a bottle of milk or sugary liquid may cause tooth decay. The milk stays in the child's mouth a long time. The germs (bacteria) in your child's mouth mix with the sugars to make a mild acid. This acid attacks the hard outer layer of the teeth (the enamel). It can make holes (cavities) in the teeth.

This can happen when your baby falls asleep with a bottle in his mouth or when he carries a bottle around and drinks from it all day long.

Tooth decay in babies is serious. A baby can have painful toothaches and the teeth may turn black and have to be pulled. If teeth are lost early, a baby can have problems with chewing and learning to talk. Permanent teeth may also be damaged as they develop.

PREVENTING DECAY IN YOUR BABY'S TEETH

Breast-feeding is the best way to feed your baby and prevent tooth decay.

- If you are bottle feeding, always hold your baby when he or she is drinking from a bottle.

- Put your baby to bed without a bottle.

- Use plain water if your baby is thirsty between feedings. Do not put pop, sweetened water or sweetened fruit juice in your baby's bottle.

- At about eight months of age, you can begin to teach your baby to drink from a cup. If you would like your child to have fruit juice occasionally, mix it with a little water and serve it from the cup.

- Slowly decrease the use of bottles as your baby nears one year of age.

Lori McMechan

PARENTING POINTS

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FALLING ASLEEP

Here are some tips to help your baby fall asleep without a bottle:

- Give her a special blanket or soft toy to hug in bed.
- Give him a clean pacifier instead of a bottle.
- Gently rub your baby's back.

Play soft music or sing to your child.

- Read a book to your baby or tell her a quiet story to prepare for sleep.

Many parents wonder when they should take their child to the dentist for the first time. The Canadian Dental Association encourages the assessment of infants, by a dentist, within six months of the eruption of the first tooth or by one year of age. The goal is to have your child visit the dentist before there is a problem with his teeth.

The Canadian Dental Association goes on to say that your child needs to see your dentist by age two or three, once all the baby teeth have come in.

This may seem early to begin regular visits to the dentist, but these first teeth are very important.

These early visits help you make sure that these first teeth stay healthy until the permanent teeth come in.

Even though the first teeth are replaced, their healthy development maintains the proper spacing for later teeth. They also help your child's jaws grow into their proper shape.

Early damage to the enamel is easily and painlessly repaired. Most problems can be cleared up before they turn into cavities.

Because these early visits are less likely to involve any cavities or fillings, your child is given the chance to develop a relationship with your dentist before treatment is necessary.

Poor oral health can affect a person's quality of life. We thank the Canadian Dental Association for reminding us to take care of the teeth and gums of even the youngest family members.



Proper dental care is vital in young children and adult supervision while brushing helps ensure that your child's teeth are being cleaned properly. (Photo Illustration by Tim Smith/Brandon Sun)