

How to Protect Your Baby's Teeth from Cavities

As I have mentioned in previous articles, dental decay runs rampant in the mouths of young children in Howard County. This results in needless suffering for the kids and great expense for the parents for dental visits and even hospital operating room sessions.

Now, I'm going to give you a series of "did you know's"

Did you know that?

Babies are born without the bacteria that cause tooth decay.

Cavities are the most common infectious disease of childhood.

The best predictor of cavities in a child is the number of cavities the mother has had.

The bacteria that cause cavities in the child are generally passed from the mother or other care giver. They can also come from an older sibling that has been infected.

Diet (what we put into our babies' mouths) certainly has an effect also. Even in the baby and toddler stages, parents must be careful. The bad bacteria eat what your baby eats, and produce the acid as their waste product that decays the teeth.

So what's a mother to do to keep her child's baby's mouth healthy? Here's a series of suggestions that will help.

Get your own mouth healthy, preferably during pregnancy. Routine dental care can be safely performed during pregnancy and may even help you carry to full term.

Do not put anything in your baby's mouth that has contacted your saliva. This includes spoons, cups, anything.

Do not clean a dropped pacifier, or anything else, with your saliva. Yes I have seen many a mom stick a dropped pacifier in their mouth to clean it off.

As soon as teeth become visible, start cleaning them on all sides with a small, soft toothbrush and a TINY amount of tooth paste. The size should be about as little as you can get on the brush. When the child learns to spit, more tooth paste can be used.

You should brush your baby or preschoolers teeth twice a day. The most important time is right before bed and then the child should have nothing but water before going to sleep. You should not give the child the responsibility to brush their own teeth at least until they can tie their own shoes.

Do Not Put Your Child To Bed With A Bottle Of Milk (or anything else but water). Anything with any type of sugar (milk sugar, fruit sugar, table sugar) can cause cavities, especially at night when salivary flow is low.

Do not let your toddler run around all day with a bottle (or sippy cup!) with anything but plain water in it for the same reason. It's not how much sugar is in the diet that causes the problems as much as how often that sugar is in the mouth. Kids need milk and juice is good at times. Just remember to make sure they are not in your baby's mouth all of the time.

Train your child to enjoy healthy lower sugar snacks like cheese, fruit, and yogurt. This is harder to do once they've become addicted to high sugar drinks and snacks.

I recommend that children see a dentist no later than when they are three. If you see any white or brown spots on the teeth before then, take them immediately.

I also recommend the fluoridated bottles of water that are available at the grocery store for kids six and under. Fluoride levels vary considerably according to what type of water (well, city, RO) the child is drinking. The bottled fluoridated water has the right level consistently.

Finally, ask your dentist or pediatrician questions. They will be happy to answer them!

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