



Preventing Early Childhood Tooth Decay

Does your child go to bed alone holding a bottle? Do you regularly give your child a bottle or sippy cup filled with sugary liquids? If you've answered "yes" to either of these questions, then your child may be at risk of developing a condition called Early Childhood Tooth Decay.

Early Childhood Tooth Decay (ECTD) is a dental condition that can severely damage the developing teeth of children between the ages of six-months and four-years-old. ECTD can be very painful for your child, and difficult and expensive to fix if left untreated. ECTD may require that your child be hospitalized to fix the teeth or have them pulled out.

What causes Early Childhood Tooth Decay?

ECTD occurs when children frequently drink from bottles or sippy cups that contain sweetened milk, juice, soda or other sugary liquids, or often snack on sugary foods. If the liquid stays in the mouth for a long period of time, the teeth get big cavities that sometimes can't be fixed. The sugar in the liquid combines with bacteria on the teeth to produce acids that attack the child's teeth, which causes them to decay. It's important to know that almost all liquids, including milk, formula, juices and other sweet drinks, have sugar in them.

How can I protect my child's teeth?

The following tips will help you to protect your child's teeth:

- Don't fill your child's bottle or sippy cup with sweetened milk, soda or other sugary drinks.
- Don't put your child to bed with a bottle. If your baby needs to be comforted, use either a bottle filled with plain water only or a clean pacifier.
- Teach your child to drink from a cup by 12 months of age.
- Clean your child's teeth and gums with a clean washcloth or a soft toothbrush at least once a day, preferable before bedtime.
- Make sure your child gets the right amount of fluoride each day. Ask your dentist or doctor if your water contains fluoride.

Be the best parent you can be and help prevent ECTD. It will make you and your child feel a lot better.

For more information on ECTD, talk with your dentist or doctor.

Comfort Tips

Instead of using a bottle, here are some ways to comfort your child when he or she is fussy:

- Give your child a clean pacifier.
- Hold or rock your child.
- Sing or play music.
- Give your child a favorite blanket or toy.
- Read to your child.
- Give your child a back rub. What is Early Childhood Tooth Decay?