

Pediatric Dental Topics



Baby Bottle Tooth Decay

Baby bottle syndrome, also called baby bottle tooth decay, is a serious condition that can destroy your child's teeth. It occurs when teeth are exposed, frequently and at length, to liquids that contain sugar. The liquid pools around the teeth and gums, providing food for the bacteria in plaque. The bacteria produce acid as a byproduct when they consume the sugar. This acid attacks your child's teeth and causes decay.

Your child's teeth are vulnerable to decay from the moment they break through the gums. You may not even notice the decay until it's too late to save the teeth, so it's crucial that you prevent bottle syndrome from occurring in the first place.

Clean teeth and gums with a clean, damp washcloth or a very soft infant toothbrush after each feeding. Place only water in the bottle, or switch to a pacifier. Come in for a dental visit around age 1. Find out if your local water supply contains fluoride. If it doesn't, we can give you a prescription for fluoride supplements.

Bottle syndrome can lead to toothaches, which are painful and make it difficult for your child to eat. Left untreated, the decay caused by bottle syndrome can cause infection, which we may result in us having to remove teeth. If baby teeth are lost too early, your child could suffer from poor nutrition, speech problems, crooked teeth, and permanent damage to adult teeth.

All liquids that contain sugar can cause bottle syndrome. This includes breast and cow's milk (which contain the sugar lactose), formula, fruit juice (which contains the sugar fructose), as well as soda and other sweetened drinks.

Importance of Primary Teeth

Because primary teeth, also called baby teeth, are eventually replaced by permanent teeth, many people don't realize that they are, in fact, very important for a child's long-term dental health.

Normally, some of the primary teeth remain in the mouth until a child is eleven or twelve. During this time, they serve as space maintainers and ensure that the permanent teeth are properly aligned as they grow into the mouth. Early loss of primary teeth often causes misalignment of the permanent teeth and may even alter normal facial development. Expensive orthodontic solutions may be necessary to correct these problems.

Children need strong, healthy teeth to chew their food. Cavities and tooth loss can make it impossible for a child to eat properly, which affects her overall level of health. Speech development can also be affected by premature tooth loss. In combination, these problems may lower a child's self-esteem during her important formative years.

As you can see, primary teeth are critically important for a child's health and development. It's important to keep them in the mouth as long as possible by practicing excellent oral hygiene and treating problems early.

Infant Teeth Homecare

As soon as your child gets his first teeth, you should begin cleaning them after feedings with a moist gauze pad or washcloth. When your child is comfortable with a toothbrush, brush his teeth twice a day with an extra-soft toothbrush. Use a pea-sized amount of toothpaste. If the teeth touch together then gently floss your child's teeth each day, and pay particular attention to areas where the teeth are close together.

Help your child brush and floss until he's seven to ten years old and able to effectively keep the plaque off his teeth by himself. After that, check his efforts occasionally. It's a good idea to keep some disclosing tablets on hand. The vegetable dye in disclosing tablets stains missed plaque red and makes it much easier to see.

Fluoride is an important preventive tool for infants. It's important that we first check the fluoride level of your child's primary source of drinking water. We sometimes prescribe fluoride tablets, and generally recommend fluoride toothpaste and fluoride treatments here in our office after cleanings.

The most serious dental problem for young children is called early childhood caries or bottle syndrome. It is caused by the constant presence of milk, formula, or fruit juice in a child's mouth during the night, during breastfeeding, during naps, or for extended periods during the day. Use water at these times to prevent this severe decay of baby teeth, and always clean your child's teeth immediately after each feeding.

Children learn best by imitation, so let them watch you as you brush and floss your teeth. Regular praise of their homecare efforts and a positive example will get your child started down the path of excellent oral hygiene.

Fluoride

The widespread use of fluoride to fight cavities has been the greatest breakthrough in the past fifty years of preventive dentistry. Fluoride can help prevent cavities by actually hardening the outer enamel layer of teeth, and it can even stop or slow down the growth of pre-existing cavities.

Most water naturally contains some fluoride, but many cities add additional fluoride to their water supplies to prevent tooth decay in their residents, especially children. When children are young and their teeth are forming, fluoride hardens the protective outer enamel layer, making it more resistant to decay. The use of fluoride in drinking water alone has dramatically decreased the incidence of cavities among school children.

Adults also benefit from the presence of fluoride in drinking water, as well as in oral hygiene products such as toothpaste and mouth rinses. Fluoride can rebuild the enamel layer of teeth to repair early cavities before they're even visible, and it can help to solve the problem of root sensitivity in older adults. Also, we sometimes prescribe fluoride rinses or gels to help eliminate germs that can cause gum disease.

We recommend fluoride toothpaste for all of our patients. We may also recommend supplemental sources of fluoride for increased protection, including fluoride drops, tablets, gels, or prescription toothpaste. We frequently administer topical fluoride treatments following cleanings in our office, especially for our young patients.

Fluoride is an important part of every prevention program. When combined with good brushing and flossing habits, fluoride can dramatically reduce the number of cavities in both children and adults.

Brushing

It's important not only that your child brush after they eat; you also need to use proper technique when brushing their teeth! Here are some tips to make your brushing sessions more effective at removing plaque and preventing decay.

Brush two teeth at a time, overlapping as you move along. It's a good idea to have a regular brushing pattern. It's fine to use any pattern you like, as long as you clean each surface of every tooth.

To prevent future cavities, use toothpaste that contains fluoride. Fluoride hardens the enamel on the surface of your teeth, and can even stop cavities in their tracks. Remember to change your toothbrush when the bristles are worn or bent, at least every three months. Old bristles don't clean well under the gumline, and they host more plaque and disease-causing bacteria.

This might seem like a lot to remember, but proper brushing technique will soon become a habit, and will keep your teeth healthy and your breath fresh.

Flossing

Brushing is a good way to prevent cavities, but flossing is just as important! Most cavities start between your teeth, where the bristles of your toothbrush simply can't reach. To keep your gums and teeth healthy, you must use dental floss to remove the plaque between your teeth at least once a day.

First, take about eighteen inches of floss and wind the two ends of it around your middle fingers, leaving about five inches between your hands. Pinch the floss between your thumbs and index fingers, and leave about one inch in between to work with. Gently guide the floss between the first two teeth using a side-to-side motion.

Pull the floss tightly in a "C" shape around the side of one tooth and slide it under the gumline. Clean the surface of the tooth by using an up-and-down motion, not the side-to-side motion you used to guide the floss between the teeth. Repeat on the side of the adjacent tooth. Then remove the floss, wind it to a fresh section, and repeat the process to clean both sides of every tooth.

If you're just beginning to floss, your gums will probably bleed a bit. After about a week of daily flossing, the bleeding should stop. If your teeth are too tight to floss, or if the floss catches or tears, let us know; it may indicate a problem that needs to be corrected.

Flossing can be time consuming and a little awkward at first, so make sure to give yourself enough time to get used to proper flossing technique. It will soon become an automatic part of your dental hygiene routine, and your teeth and gums will be healthier for it.

Disclosing Tablets

Disclosing tablets contain harmless red vegetable dye that reveals plaque left on your teeth by turning it red temporarily. By using these special chewable tablets after you brush and floss, you can see the areas that you're missing.

Plaque, the sticky film of food and bacteria that's constantly forming on your teeth, is the main cause of tooth decay and periodontal disease. If it's not removed, plaque builds up and mineralizes to become rock-hard tartar in as little as twenty-four hours. There's no way you can remove tartar at home, because a

toothbrush and floss won't even budge it. Tartar can only be removed with by a dental professional, using special techniques and instruments.

After brushing and flossing, simply chew a disclosing tablet, swish it around in your mouth for about a minute, and then rinse with water. Using a small dental mirror, check all sides of your teeth for any areas that have been stained red, especially near the gumline. Brush and floss these areas again to be confident that your teeth are free from harmful plaque.

Without even realizing it, you may be regularly missing certain parts of your teeth when you brush and floss; disclosing tablets can help you identify these neglected areas. For example, many of our patients don't brush their back teeth, the back sides of their teeth, or the area next to the gumline as thoroughly as they should. Using disclosing tablets for a few days will show you if you routinely miss any areas. When you know where these areas are, you can spend a bit more time brushing and flossing them, and soon, it will be part of your regular dental hygiene routine.

Cavities

In science classes, you've learned to be very careful with acid. Did you know that you can have acid in your mouth, and that this acid can cause a hole to develop in your tooth? Read on to find out more!

Our enemy in the fight against cavities is plaque. Plaque is a sticky film of food and bacteria (Sugar Bugs) that forms constantly on your teeth. The bacteria in plaque thrive on the sugar in the food, and produce acid as a byproduct when they break down the sugar. Like all acids, the acid produced by the bacteria is corrosive, which means that it dissolves other materials. Your teeth are the victims of this corrosive action; the acid wears away at them, eventually creating holes in the outer layer of your teeth, called cavities.

The hard outer layer of your teeth is called the enamel. Cavities first form in the enamel layer of your teeth. Beneath the enamel is a softer layer called the dentin. If a cavity dissolves through the enamel and reaches the dentin, it can grow much more quickly. That's why regular checkups and cleanings are so important; if we find a cavity, we can restore your tooth while the cavity is still small and isolated in the outer enamel layer.

To repair a tooth with a cavity, we usually remove the decayed portion of the tooth and replace it with a filling, provided the damage is not extensive and there is still plenty of healthy tooth structure remaining. However, preventing decay is the preferred solution! We'll be happy to work with you so you'll learn to keep your teeth free of plaque and decay.

Fillings

We want the entire procedure to be comfortable for you, so the first thing we do is make sure your mouth is thoroughly numb. Depending on the size of the filling and which tooth we're working on, we may use a rubber dam or other means to isolate your tooth from saliva.

Then we remove the decay and shape the tooth with the handpiece (Mr. Whistle and Mr. Bumpy). To mold the filling to the shape of the tooth, we first surround it with a thin, flexible band. A small wooden wedge between the teeth holds it snugly in place. We press the filling material into the tooth. White fillings harden when they are exposed to a bright light, while silver fillings harden on their own. Then we check the bite with a colored tape that shows us where your teeth are touching, and we make sure floss still works. And that's all there is to it!

Mouthguards

You probably know that mouthguards are mandatory for high-contact sports like football and hockey. What you may not know is that the majority of mouth injuries occur in children between the ages of seven and fourteen, while they are engaged in casual sports and other common activities like skateboarding or riding a bike.

Any activity that could result in a fall or a blow to the head puts your child at risk for mouth injuries. Lost or broken teeth are the most common kind of mouth injury, but accidents may also cause concussions, jaw bone fractures and dislocations, as well as damage to orthodontic appliances and the jaw joint. Fortunately, mouthguards can help protect your children from these expensive and painful injuries.

Stock mouthguards are used off the shelf with no modifications and offer little or no protection. Boil-and-bite mouthguards fit somewhat better because they are molded to the child's teeth, but they are not thick enough to provide the necessary support for the teeth and jaw.

To fabricate a custom-made mouthguard, we take impressions of the mouth during the first appointment. We use the impressions to make models, and a dental laboratory uses the models to create the mouthguard. During the second appointment, we make slight adjustments to the mouthguard to ensure that it's comfortable. They allow breathing or speaking with minimal interference.

Each year, millions of children's teeth are knocked out as a result of accidents during everyday activities like skateboarding and biking. A custom-made mouthguard is a great way to prevent injury and protect your child's smile!

Braces Care

Braces are a great way to straighten and realign your teeth to create the beautiful smile you deserve! However, caring for your teeth while you have braces can be challenging, because there are a lot of brackets, bands, and wires to work around. Because these fixtures create dozens of "nooks and crannies" in your mouth, there are more places for food particles and plaque to hide. This can result in tooth decay, gum disease, and permanent staining, which will negatively affect the terrific smile your braces were meant to create!

We'll be happy to show you special techniques for caring for your teeth while you have your braces. Floss at least once a day. We'll give you a floss threader to use at home. Insert floss into the loop of the floss threader, then insert the floss threader between the wires and your teeth. Remove the floss threader, pull the floss into a "C" shape around the side of your tooth, and floss up and down the sides of each tooth.

attention to the areas where the brackets and bands meet the tooth, and where the tooth meets the gumline. It's also a good idea to carry a travel toothbrush so you can brush your teeth when you're away from home.

Brush each tooth using a small, circular motion. Get between the wires and brackets as much as you can with the bristles of your toothbrush.

Professional cleanings help you keep your mouth free from plaque and cavities.

Cutting down on sweets will help you avoid tooth decay, so avoid sugary foods and foods that stick to your teeth. Also, watch out for hard foods like Cornnuts, popcorn hulls, and ice, because they can damage your braces. It's best to eat softer foods and cut hard foods into smaller bites.

Pulpotomy

A pulpotomy is the surgical removal of irritated, inflamed nerve tissue (also called pulp) from within the crown portion of a primary (baby) tooth. The healthy root canals are left intact.

When decay in your child's tooth penetrates the enamel, and then the next layer - the dentin - it quickly approaches the innermost part of the tooth, the pulp. At this point, when the decay is close to or has barely penetrated the pulp, the nerve is still alive, but it is compromised. If left untreated, the decay will penetrate and spread throughout the nerve tissue in the pulp, which will lead to discomfort.

First, we thoroughly numb the affected area. We must keep your mouth dry. A rubber dam or cotton rolls can protect like a safety net, preventing debris from falling to the back of your child's throat.

the tooth down into the pulp chamber, and thoroughly clean out the nerve tissue.

Discomfort after the procedure is unlikely. However, if your child does experience some pain, a children's pain reliever should be given, following label directions.

A pulpotomy is a relatively quick and painless procedure that's extremely effective in eliminating infection in the nerve and saving your child's tooth.

Stainless Steel Crowns

Small cavities in primary teeth can be repaired with fillings, because after we remove the decayed part of the tooth, there's still plenty of remaining natural tooth structure. However, when a primary tooth has a large cavity, there may not be enough tooth structure left to place a filling. For this reason, we use crowns to repair large cavities in primary teeth. A crown covers a damaged tooth to strengthen and protect it.

Crowns for adult teeth are fabricated in a dental lab and are made of porcelain, metal and porcelain, or gold. Crowns for children's primary teeth are most often pre-made of stainless steel, and can be adapted to your child's tooth and cemented in place in only one appointment. They are relatively easy for children to take care of, and are much less expensive than adult crowns.

We want the entire procedure to be comfortable for your child, so the first thing we do is thoroughly numb the tooth and surrounding area. Then we use the handpiece to remove any decay and shape the tooth. We select a crown, shape it, and adjust it until it fits the tooth precisely. We then cement the crown in place. To complete the procedure, we double check both your child's bite and the fit of the new stainless steel crown.

Space Maintainer

Normally, as a permanent tooth comes in under a baby tooth, the roots of the baby tooth dissolve away and the permanent tooth replaces the baby tooth. In addition to being important for chewing, the baby tooth holds the adjacent teeth in place. When a baby tooth is lost early, due to decay or injury, the adjacent teeth may drift together causing loss of space in the dental arch.

When a baby tooth is lost early, this shifting and loss of arch space can be prevented by placing a space maintainer. It generally takes two appointments to complete a space maintainer. During the first

appointment, an orthodontic band is carefully placed and an impression is taken. A model of the child's mouth is made from this impression so that the dental laboratory can form the space maintainer to the exact contours of the mouth. During the next appointment, the space maintainer is tried in, adjusted if necessary, and then cemented in place.

Space maintainers are used until the permanent teeth begin to break through the gums. While wearing a space maintainer, it is important to avoid chewing gum, sticky candies, and hard foods like Cornnuts or ice. Following up with periodic checks of the space maintainer here in our office will make sure it's still functioning properly and keeping all the teeth in their proper position.