



AUSTRALIAN DENTAL
ASSOCIATION INC.

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Caring for teeth for life

The dental health of Australian children may well be declining according to reports, which suggest an increase in decay rates among children.¹ Additionally, the AIHW has reported that dental cavities in children aged five to nine are the second most common reason for hospital admission².

Ironically, almost all dental disease is preventable. As part of a community campaign to promote good oral health care for babies and toddlers, the Australian Dental Association (ADA) has developed three fact sheets of guidelines and tips for parents and carers of young children to help prevent early childhood dental decay.

Additionally, the ADA has created a brochure, available from your dentist, which contains comprehensive information on caring for teeth during early childhood.

Known as early childhood caries (ECC), dental decay in infants and young children can have a devastating affect. A child's baby or primary teeth are essential for chewing and speaking properly and for the successful eruption of adult or secondary teeth. Children who are taught good oral health hygiene early on are more likely to maintain healthy teeth throughout adulthood.

Risk Factors for ECCs:

Dental decay is caused by bacteria. Many foods and beverages contain bacteria, which if left exposed to teeth, can form into plaque. Plaque acids then eat into teeth, leading to tooth decay.

In babies and toddlers, once teeth have erupted, the main risks for ECCs are:

- A high sugar diet, with lots of snacks. Snacking can contribute to dental decay because there is not time between eating to allow teeth to recover from the plaque acids and to remineralise
- Settling your baby to sleep with a bottle of milk, juice or other beverages or breast milk. This allows the child's teeth to 'wash' in the natural sugars, which in turn can then form bacteria and plaque. A better option is to give your baby or toddler a bottle or breastfeed before bed, then clean the gums or teeth and offer a bottle of plain water
- Bad oral hygiene. Oral hygiene should start from birth. A baby's gums should be wiped after feeding and once primary teeth start to erupt, these can be cleaned with a toothbrush specially developed for young children

To help prevent the risk of ECCs:

¹ A Picture of Australia's Children, AIHW, 2 May 2005

² Australia's Health June 2006, AIHW, National Hospital Morbidity Database 2003-04

- Offer your baby plain water in their bottle, especially before bed
- As much as possible, encourage your baby or child to eat healthy snacks and as they get older, try to limit the amount of snacks
- Encourage your baby to begin drinking from a cup from nine to 12 months of age
- Clean your child's teeth every night before bed
- Once your child's primary teeth have erupted, they should be having dental check ups – around one year of age

A child born into the 21st century can expect to have their teeth for life. Protecting these teeth from dental decay and disease can prevent pain and suffering, and costly treatment.

Visit www.ada.org.au for more information on oral care for babies and toddlers, and to access free fact sheets with tips on caring for young teeth.

For more information, to request an interview with an ADA spokesperson or to request an image, please contact Porter Novelli Melbourne:

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