



They're NOT Just Baby Teeth

Dr. Leonard B. Smith (D.D.S., M.Sc., F.R.C.D., F.A.A.P., F.I.C.D.)
recommends these easy steps to save your child from ECC:

Early Childhood Caries (ECC) is a form of dental decay which primarily affects infants aged 0-3. It is 5 times more likely to occur than asthma and is completely preventable. \$2-5 dollars a year spent on baby oral health supplies is all that is required to prevent your child suffering from toothaches, inability to chew, tooth extractions, oral surgery, and in extreme cases, death.

Some dentists or pediatricians will recommend that a child should visit the dentist at the age of 3, but baby teeth begin developing much sooner. In order to prevent ECC and other dental problems, children should be taken to the dentist at around 6 months of age when teeth begin to develop.

Neglecting to care for baby teeth can lead to many difficulties in later life: nerve damage in adult teeth, chronic pain, low self-esteem, learning disorders, fear of doctors or medical treatment, and malnutrition or obesity.

All new mothers must be aware of the risk of ECC and understand that the few easy steps taken to prevent it will not only save thousands in dental care, but keep your child's teeth healthy and bright.

1

Before baby teeth appear:

- Gums collect sugar from breast milk and other substances in baby's mouth; ensure gums are cleaned carefully with soft baby toothbrush and water
- Watch carefully for signs of baby's first teeth appearing. When baby teeth begin to appear, around six months, schedule an appointment with your dentist

2

After baby teeth appear:

- Baby's teeth should be brushed and carefully cleaned every day. A soft baby toothbrush with just water or a small amount of toothpaste is safe to use
- Clean front and back of teeth, tongue, gums, and inside of baby's cheeks
- A soft, damp cloth or finger brush may be used instead of a toothbrush

3

Things to avoid:

- Never give baby a pacifier or bottle dipped in honey to suck on; prolonged exposure to sugar increases chance of decay
- Never allow baby to sleep with constant access to your breast; the sugar in breast milk will cause the same damage to baby teeth as honey or sugar

4

If baby shows signs of ECC:

- If baby is showing signs of constant toothache by crying for no clear reason, or if teeth show signs of brown decay, take baby to the dentist immediately
- Remember: no baby is too young to see a dentist; a pediatrician may not have the same knowledge as a pediatric dentist