

Healthy Teeth for Children

Did you know that severe tooth decay can occur in children?

Children's teeth are important for eating, talking and smiling.

Tooth decay:

- Makes teeth look bad
- Is painful
- May cause sleeping problems
- Can cause poor self-esteem
- Can lead to infections and tooth loss
- Is expensive to treat

What Causes Tooth Decay?

Bacteria in the mouth mixes with sugar in food and forms an acid. This acid causes tooth decay. Sugar is found in fruit juice, sweetened tea, soft drinks, breast milk, cow's milk, baby formulas and many other foods. The longer the acids are in the mouth, the greater the chance of tooth decay.

Sugar + Bacteria = Acid

Acid + Teeth = Decay



Babies should not go to sleep while breastfeeding or with formula, milk, or juice in a bottle. This will cause more acid to form in the mouth. Never put baby to sleep with any food or drink.

Normally, saliva helps to wash away food. It also stops acids made by mouth bacteria from working. This protective effect decreases during sleep because less saliva is produced.

Foods to Keep Teeth Healthy:

- Limit the amount of juice you give your child. If you do offer it, give no more than 60 to 120 ml (2 to 4 oz) of 100% juice per day. It is better to use a cup and serve juice with a meal or snack only.
- Avoid food high in sugar such as dried fruits, candy, sweet baked goods, pop and fruit drinks such as punch.
- Serve nutritious, tooth-friendly snacks such as plain yogurt, hard boiled egg, cubes of cheese, sandwiches, fresh fruit, raw or cooked vegetables, peanut butter (not recommended for children with peanut allergies), hummous, unsweetened cereals and bread.

- Good nutrition helps children’s teeth to be healthy and well formed. Follow ***Eating Well with Canada’s Food Guide***, and include foods from all of the four food groups: Vegetables and Fruit, Grain Products, Milk and Alternatives and Meat and Alternatives.

Caring for teeth and gums:

- Wipe your baby’s gums with a soft clean cloth twice a day daily before baby has teeth.
- Don’t leave your baby in bed with a bottle of formula, milk or juice. If the baby should have a bottle at sleep time, only put water in the bottle.
- Clean your baby’s teeth before she goes to sleep.
- Do not give your child a pacifier dipped in honey or other



sweeteners. Giving honey to babies can lead to more serious problems. **Honey should not be given to children under one year old since it can cause botulism, a serious type of food poisoning.**

- Use toothpaste with fluoride when your child is old enough to spit it out. If the child is unable to spit it out, do **not** use toothpaste. Instead, use toothbrush and water.
- Start giving a your baby a cup when he can sit. Babies older than one year should be using a cup, not a bottle.
- Once a month, lift your baby’s lip and check for changes in colour or spots on your child’s teeth. If you see white or brown spots on the teeth, visit the dentist right away.
- Take your child for the first dental visit at 12 months.
- Be a role model to your child. Let your child watch you brush your teeth.

For more information

- Canadian Pediatric Society: caringforkids.cps.ca/
- Toronto Public Health: toronto.ca/health
- EatRight Ontario: 1-877-5102 or Ontario.ca/EatRight
- Health Canada: hc.sc.gc.ca