

# LOOKING AHEAD FOR DENTAL HEALTH

*When your baby is Newborn to 1 Year Old*

## **Is there something I should do before my baby gets teeth?**

Establishing a pattern of separating, eating and sleeping while your baby is small is very important. Feed your baby, then wipe off the gums with a gauze square. This separates eating from sleeping and gets your baby accustomed to mouth cleaning routines. Keeping the bottle out of the crib allows the baby to learn to sleep through the night at a younger age and avoids a later struggle over taking away the bedtime bottle.

## **When will my baby get teeth?**

Usually at about six months, but there is a huge variation between different babies. Some start erupting their teeth soon after they are born, and some are toothless until they are 18 months old. The order in which the teeth erupt is almost always the same. The lower front teeth usually come in first.

## **How can I make teething easier for my baby?**

Teething rings are important to help the teeth work through the gums. As soon as the teeth penetrate the gum tissue, the discomfort begins to go away. Try cooling the teething ring in the refrigerator. Give the baby Tylenol Drops when needed, but be sure to stay within the guidelines on the bottle. A surface anesthetic preparation like Ora-Gel for Teething may be useful at bedtime or when the baby seems particularly upset, but it washes away in a short time. Be sure to use it only according to the directions. There is no perfect solution, so just give extra love and this problem will solve itself. If the baby has a fever or actually seems sick,

be sure to check with your pediatrician. An illness may be present along with the teething.

## **When should I start cleaning my baby's teeth?**

As soon as they erupt through the gums. You can use a gauze square or a little terrycloth finger cover at first. Change to a baby size toothbrush as soon as possible because it cleans better between the teeth and at the gumline. Place the brush squarely against the tooth at the gumline and jiggle side to side. Don't let your toddler carry a toothbrush because of the danger of falling with it.

## **When should my baby first see a pediatric dentist?**

About one year of age is a good time for the toddler to have a first exam. This lets the parents and dentist get an early start on a prevention program that will keep decay away and minimize other dental problems too. If you see any suspicious spots on your baby's teeth, particularly if the teeth came in early or the baby has been taking a bottle to bed, don't wait. Bring the baby any time you suspect a problem.

## **How does the pediatric dentist work with a toddler?**

We keep the child secure by leaving him/her in the parent's lap. After a period of getting acquainted, we move into a knee-to-knee position with the parent who slowly leans the child's head back onto the dentist's knees. Many children accept this procedure happily, but even if there is a little fussing, the

# LOOKING AHEAD FOR DENTAL HEALTH

*When your baby is Newborn to 1 Year Old*

exam only takes about a minute. It is not usually necessary to do any teeth cleaning.

## **What is Baby Bottle Tooth Decay (BBTD)?**

BBTD is decay of the baby teeth caused by taking a nap or night bottle with anything but water in it. Milk, formula, juice, Jell-O, sugar-water, and Kool-Aid can all cause tooth decay. When the baby is sleeping, its saliva is not washing across the teeth to protect them from decay acid. Nearly 100% of tooth decay in infants and toddlers is caused by the nighttime bottle, and BBTD is the largest cause of surgical procedures on children between 12 and 36 months. This type of tooth decay advances very rapidly and can cause abscessed teeth in year old children.

## **Why don't all babies who take night bottles get decay?**

Some babies do not have the type of bacterium needed to change the sugar in the bottle into decay acid. Both the sugar and the bacterium must be present for BBTD. Your baby can receive the decay bacterium from the kisses or food tasting of a caregiver, but there is no easy way for us to know this. So, we concentrate on avoiding the night bottle. Then, if the baby gets the decay bacterium there will still be no BBTD.

## **Won't the baby teeth be lost before they cause a problem?**

The last of the baby upper front teeth are usually not lost until 8 years old. The last of the baby molars stay until age 12.

## **How does the pediatric dentist repair BBTD?**

By doing early exams on toddlers we can find cavities when they are very small. Simple inexpensive measures like changing to water in the bottle, better brushing, hand curing the decay and temporary cement fillings may be all that is needed. When severe cases require sedation, or general anesthesia by a board certified anesthesiologist, we have the qualifications and staff privileges to provide these services.

## **What should I know about tooth accidents?**

If the tooth is still in the same position and is firm, it is usually OK, even if there is a small amount of blood around the gumline, or a small chip in the biting edge. The types of accidents most likely to cause tooth loss are those in which the tooth is moved, either backwards or forward or up into the gum. Call your pediatric dentist about all accidents of the severe type and any minor accidents about which you are uneasy.

*This material is part of a series produced and published by*

**Santiago A. Surillo, D.D.S., M.S.**  
Pediatric Dentistry  
Orthodontics  
Diplomate, American board of  
Orthodontics



**Kenneth R. Whitcomb, D.D.S.**  
Diplomate, American board of  
Pediatric Dentistry