

Daily Oral Health Tips for **Babies and Toddlers**

(NC) Typically, we don't think of cavities or gum disease in connection with babies. But the truth is that oral diseases begin very early — from the time bacteria begin to live in the oral cavity.

As new teeth come in and the child's diet becomes more like an adult's, bacteria continue to produce acids and toxins that are harmful to hard and soft tissues in the mouth. By the time they're teenagers all children have experienced some form of oral infectious disease.

Here are simple steps recommended by the College of Dental Hygienists of Ontario that you can take at home to reduce the risk of oral infection and the development of Early Childhood Caries (ECC), a severe form of tooth decay in primary teeth.



- Keep your own teeth and gums as healthy as possible to minimize transmission of strep bacteria.
- Develop a routine for cleaning your baby's mouth. Wipe their mouth and gums using a clean, wet cloth or piece of gauze after each feeding.
- Gently clean newly erupted teeth with gauze or a washcloth, or with a small soft toothbrush (no toothpaste) specially designed for baby teeth.
- Keep non-nutritious, sugary fruit punches and other drinks out of baby bottles.
- If you do use a bottle or sip cup at naptime during the day or at bedtime, avoid juices, milk or formula as all of these contain some amount of sugar. Use plain water instead.
- Reduce the frequency of night-time feedings.

Frequent feeding at night when saliva flow is at its lowest increases the risk of ECC. The pooling of any liquid (except water) around teeth at night also increases the risk.

- If your baby uses a soother, check its packaging and shape to ensure it has an orthodontic design, which will help prevent teeth from moving. The best ones are nipple-shaped, keep baby's lips closed and encourage natural breathing through the nose.
- Never dip soothers in anything sweet; honey is one of the worst offenders.
- If your baby is on liquid medication — usually sweetened for taste — rinse and brush their mouth with clear water immediately after the medication is given.
- Check for early warning signs of ECC by lifting up baby's lips. White, chalky teeth signal a mild case; brown or black stained teeth and erosion indicate a more serious case. Contact your dental hygienist immediately.
- Gradually introduce foods such as fresh fruits and vegetables to the diet. These foods, which require hard or long chewing, cause saliva to flow, which removes the acid and returns cavity-protecting calcium to the teeth.

Find more information at www.cdho.org.