



Why the Concern? They're Just Baby Teeth!

Have you ever had a toothache while trying to concentrate to complete your work accurately and keep a happy disposition? It's difficult, isn't it? For young children with tooth pain, the experience is even more frustrating because they do not have the vocabulary to describe their pain. They often act out with disruptive behavior. Even worse, children with chronic pain become so accustomed to it, they do not know life without it. They go to sleep with pain and to school with pain. It affects their energy levels and even their self-esteem. Living with untreated pain due to tooth decay can be associated with poor school performance and disruptive behavior that not only affects the child, but also those around them.

According to a recent Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) study, 28% of pre-school children have experienced tooth decay. About 40% of children entering kindergarten have decay and this number is on the rise.

Long-lasting effects from chronic tooth pain:

- The "wiring" of the brain takes place at a furious pace during the earliest years. Children who are wired for constant pain due to a chronic tooth pain are in a constant state of "fright or flight". They may eventually show the same signs as a child who has endured long-term abuse and neglect.
- Recent studies have linked chronic dental decay with Type II Diabetes, heart failure and even death due to brain abscesses (infections) that began in the mouth.
- Children (and adults) with rotten teeth and swollen gums do not smile. Self-esteem suffers, friendships are not made and children tend to isolate.

What to do?

- Before your baby has any teeth, clean her mouth after each feeding with a clean, wet cloth, wiping gums and mouth.
- For older children, a pea-size amount of toothpaste (ADA approved) on a small, soft bristled brush goes a long way. Follow it up with a little floss! Cleaning the teeth, at least twice a day and especially at bedtime is crucial for a happy smile.
- Children need a source of fluoride. If you are unsure about your child's fluoride intake, ask your dentist, medical doctor or public health nurse.
- Eat nutritious meals and snacks. Bacteria (germs) and food high in sugar are two things that cause early childhood caries (decay).
- NEVER put your child to bed with anything in a bottle or sippy cup except water. The liquids pool around the teeth and can cause tooth decay over time.
- **Go to the dentist!** The dentists and hygienists have special tools to remove built-up plaque before it decays the teeth. It is their jobs to keep mouth happy and healthy. Important: If you have an appointment and cannot make it, call and reschedule. When your child has an appointment, that time is set aside for their care.
- For more dental information contact:

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