



AUSTRALIAN DENTAL
ASSOCIATION INC.

Babies and Toddlers

Tooth Decay

Does your child have this disease?

Tooth decay is a disease that 50% of Australian children under six suffer from that can result in pain, the removal of teeth, bad breath and a whole host of other problems.

When we hear the word disease we think that it's something you 'get', that it's unavoidable or you might have done something to contribute to having it, but overall it was just bad luck. This is not the case with dental decay!

1. Tooth decay is PREVENTABLE and not inevitable.
2. Preventing decay is NOT difficult.
3. Early decay can be reversed.

How to stop decay in toddlers

The key to stopping decay is forming good habits from an early age, and maybe undoing a few bad ones on the way.

Brushing children's teeth thoroughly twice a day for two minutes is vital. That's less time than it takes to make a cup of coffee to make sure your child isn't spending all day with harmful bacteria on their teeth and gums.

Diet plays a major role. When we think of the foods that are bad for our kids it is chocolate, lollies, and fast food that generally top the list. Yes, these foods are high in sugar and carbohydrates and cause decay, but not in moderation and with proper brushing. It is how frequently we allow kids to eat these foods that cause the real problems.

In fact, it's not just the foods that we think are bad that cause decay if eaten too often or over a long period of time. Savoury biscuits, cereals, snack bars and muffins cause damage too. It's best to make sure that your child eats set meals rather than 'grazing', has a balanced diet rather than eating too much of one thing, and make sure anything sugary (even if it doesn't taste sweet) is in moderation.

Babies can get decay too

As soon as your baby has teeth they are susceptible to decay. Never put soft drink, juice, sports drinks, flavoured milk, or

anything sweet in your baby's bottle. You are exposing them to high concentrations of sugar for long periods of time which is a recipe for decay.

Similarly, dipping a dummy/pacifier in honey or sugar might get you a gummy smile, but it will do some damage sitting in your baby's mouth for hours on end.

How to check if your child has decay

Knowing how to prevent decay and forming good habits is the best method of making sure your child doesn't have decay, but if you're not sure, it's wise to check every now and then.

Lift up their top lip, roll down their lower lip so you can see the gums and look for white patches on the teeth that are close to the gum that don't come off after brushing. This is an early sign that tooth decay might be a problem. However, if you see grey, brown or black spots anywhere on the teeth this is not a good sign and you should book an appointment with your dentist straight away.

Changes in behaviour can sometimes be a red flag – if your child is waking regularly in the night, is complaining of a sore tooth, or regularly has bad breath these can all be signs of decay.

Whose job is it to stop decay?

In early childhood this responsibility is yours. Making sure brushing and flossing happen when they should, providing a balanced diet and ensuring foods containing sugar are not eaten too frequently are all your jobs until your child is old enough to do it themselves. Teach your children these habits are not an option but a part of life.

Don't worry, you're not alone!

There are dental professionals to advise you and give you specific advice and tips that will work for your family. If you form the habits they will do the maintenance and make sure your child's mouth is in tip-top shape.

This means taking your child for their first dental appointment by 12 months and a regular check up as recommended by your dentist after that. Seeing a dentist regularly is one of the best ways to maintain good oral health.

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For more information on oral health and looking after your teeth, visit www.ada.org.au