



## BREASTFEEDING AND ORAL HEALTH

Breastfeeding provides many health benefits to infants. It lowers the risk of serious infections and diseases including respiratory and ear infections, leukemia, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), and childhood obesity. The value of breastfeeding and human milk for infants also boosts emotional and psychological benefits as the mother and newborn create a bond and closeness from nursing. Mothers who breastfeed have better health outcomes, as it lowers the risk for breast and ovarian cancers, Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and postpartum depression. Breastfeeding also has financial advantages, as families who follow recommended breastfeeding practices can save more than \$1,200 to \$1,500 in costs for infant formula in the first year alone (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK52687/>).

### Breastfeeding and Oral Health

Breastfeeding can specifically reduce the risk of oral health problems in babies. It naturally promotes strengthening and development of the jaw by forcing the child to actively squeeze milk out of the mother's breast through an action of both tongue and facial muscles. Bottle feeding, on the other hand, requires less effort to drain the milk, thus under-stimulating the muscles in the face.

Prolonged bottle feeding can lead to malocclusion issues such as open bites, cross bites, and overbites. Because infants grow rapidly and their bones are still changing, even a small force, if repeated frequently, can change the jaw and teeth position, and affect facial development. Parents and guardians who opt to bottle-feed should be aware of how incorrect positioning when feeding from a bottle can cause dental problems.

### HOW INCORRECT BABY BOTTLE POSITIONS CAN CAUSE DENTAL PROBLEMS

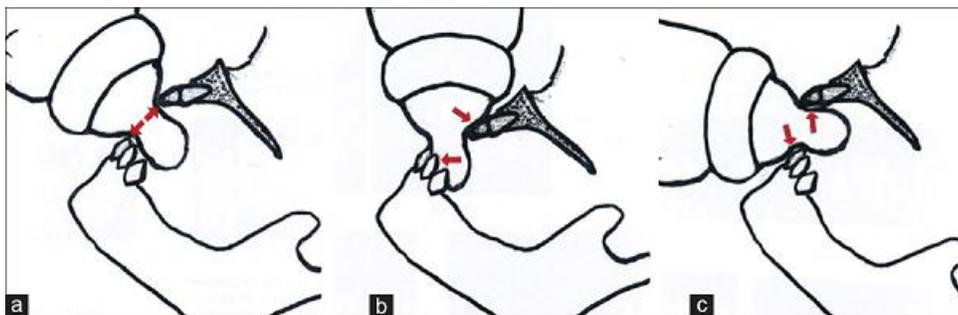


Image Source: Journal of Indian Society of Pedodontics and Preventive Dentistry

**Figure a: Incorrect positioning**

**Figure b: Correct positioning**

**Figure c: Incorrect positioning**

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Babies who are exclusively breastfed avoid baby bottle tooth decay, which is caused by putting a baby to bed with a bottle containing sugary liquids such as formula, milk, or fruit juice. When baby's teeth are overly exposed to sugary drinks, their first teeth – most often the upper front teeth – decay, leaving unsightly rotten holes and pits.

Baby bottle tooth decay can lead to cavities in all teeth. Cavities in baby teeth can cause pain and serious infection that can spread to other parts of the body if left untreated. When baby teeth are lost prematurely due to decay, it can lead to physical and mental problems such as malnutrition and low self-esteem. Whether children are breastfed or bottle-fed, oral hygiene for infants and toddlers is equally important and both should see the dentist by age 1.

### **MODERATE BABY BOTTLE TOOTH DECAY**



Image Source: [https://www.ada.org/~media/ADA/Publications/Files/ADA\\_PatientSmart\\_BBTD.ashx](https://www.ada.org/~media/ADA/Publications/Files/ADA_PatientSmart_BBTD.ashx)

### **When your baby gets teeth**

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommend breastfeeding for the first year while the World Health Organization encourages mothers to nurse until the baby is 2 years old. Since a baby could start to get teeth as young as 6 months, it is important for mothers to know that they do not have to stop breastfeeding when the baby starts teething. They need to start brushing the baby's teeth as soon as they show in the mouth.

### **Prevent cavities in breastfed and bottle-fed babies**

Since breast milk contains sugar, it can contribute to cavities even before your baby's teeth appear. Good oral hygiene should start at birth. Wipe your baby's gums every day, whether your baby is breastfed or bottle-fed, after every feeding if possible.

Beginning a few days after birth, use a clean, moist gauze pad or washcloth to wipe baby's gums every day. As soon as the first tooth appears, gently brush baby's teeth twice a day using an age-appropriate toothbrush and a smear of fluoride toothpaste (the size of a grain of rice). Fluoride is safe for children of all ages in the proper amount. Schedule your child's dental appointment by age 1 for more important early guidance.

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## Breastfeeding mothers should practice good oral and dental hygiene

To prevent gum disease and cavities, all new mothers should brush twice a day, floss once a day, and visit their dentist for regular cleanings. Breastfeeding mothers who need a dental procedure that requires medication should talk to their dentist, personal physician, and pediatrician to make sure it is safe for baby.

New mothers also need to stay hydrated, especially if breastfeeding, because a dry mouth increases the risk for gum disease and cavities. Breastfeeding mothers will experience more thirst and hunger than usual, so it is important for them to choose healthy drinks and snacks to supplement their milk supply and keep their teeth and body healthy. Breastfeeding mothers should consult their doctors and visit [MyPlate.gov](http://MyPlate.gov) for more information about balanced diets.

Do not share any eating utensils with children, as the bacteria that can cause cavities and illness can be transferred from mom's mouth to baby's mouth.

### For more information

For more information, contact the Division of Public Health, Bureau of Oral Health and Dental Services, at 302-622-4540 and [www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/hsm/ohphome.html](http://www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/hsm/ohphome.html).

For breastfeeding support, visit the Delaware Women, Infant and Children (WIC) Program at <https://www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/chca/dphwicbfhom01.html> and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) Works Resource System at [https://wicworks.fns.usda.gov/explore-resources?f\[0\]=topic:34](https://wicworks.fns.usda.gov/explore-resources?f[0]=topic:34).

Nursing mothers can search for medication effects on them and their babies on the U.S. National Library of Medicine's Drugs and Lactation Database ([LactMed](https://www.nlm.nih.gov/lactation/)). Alternative medications are displayed if available. They should discuss findings with their doctors.

### Resources

1. American Dental Association. 2020. Breastfeeding. In Mouth Healthy. Retrieved July 16, 2020 from <https://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/b/breastfeeding>
2. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK52682/3>
3. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/22978082/>
4. <https://www.mdpi.com/2072-6643/12/12/3688/pdf>
5. <https://www.iisppd.com/>
6. <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/baby/teething-tooth-care/Pages/How-to-Prevent-Tooth-Decay-in-Your-Baby.aspx>

A dime-sized smear of fluoride toothpaste



Image Source:  
American Dental  
Association