Early Childhood Caries

Early childhood caries, also known as "baby bottle tooth decay" or "nursing caries," is a type of severe tooth destruction seen in infants and young children. It primarily affects the upper front teeth in the beginning but can affect the rest of the teeth in later stages.

The cause of early childhood caries is improper feeding habits during infancy and early childhood.

Preventing Early Childhood Caries

You can prevent your child from getting early childhood caries. If you are bottle-feeding past age one:

- Avoid letting your child nap or sleep with a bottle. If you are already doing so, use only water.

- Avoid using a bottle as a pacifier to comfort your child.

- Bottles should be used for feeding purposes only.

- All other drinks should come from a cup.

If you are breast-feeding past age one and when there is plaque present on the teeth:

- Avoid frequent feedings once your child's teeth have erupted;

- Avoid feeding your child for a prolonged period of time;

- Avoid all night feedings (sleeping with child);

- Have your child on a feeding schedule instead of allowing your baby to feed whenever he or she wants to.

If you are both bottle and breast-feeding your child:

- Have your child begin using a cup at six months of age. Start with a cup with a lid and water. Have your child practice drinking from the cup during a bath so spills are not a concern. Just don't let the bath water mix with the clean drinking water.

- Discontinue the bottle by one year of age.

- Do not use honey, sugar, juice or other forms of sugar on pacifiers because the sugar will coat the backs your child's teeth and possibly lead to tooth decay.

- Begin wiping your child's teeth as soon as they erupt, around six months of age. After the last feeding of the day use a wet, clean washcloth to remove plaque from teeth.

- When you begin to brush your child's teeth there's no need to use toothpaste. Consult with your dentist for when your child should have toothpaste and the proper amount that should be used.