

Common Childhood Habits Could Endanger Kids' Teeth

Parents should monitor use of pacifiers, thumbs, and bedtime bottles



Anyone who has experienced parenthood knows how a well-timed sippy cup of juice or a pacifier can save the day — or the night. But the same things that soothe and comfort might also bring about oral health problems later in life.

In most cases, an infant obsessed with thumb sucking or a young toddler who needs a pacifier to nap are just fine, provided that these habits aren't carried on for too long. How do you know when it's time to break your child of his or her habit?

“Some kids continue these habits for a number of years without having any oral health problems, but it's still a good idea to wean children from these habits early to reduce the chances that they would cause improper jaw alignment or teeth positioning,” said Max Anderson, DDS, a national oral health advisor for Delta Dental Plans Association. “Your dentist can help monitor

the situation and provide recommendations for preserving your child's oral health.”

Of more concern to dentists is the practice of giving children juice or milk in a bottle or sippy cup to sip on throughout the day or at bedtime. Prolonged exposure to the sugars found in milk and juice contributes to tooth decay and a condition known as early childhood caries, a painful and damaging consequence for young children to endure.

“Some people think it's not a big deal for a young child to get a cavity or lose a baby tooth since the primary teeth eventually fall out anyway,” said Dr. Anderson. “However, maintaining healthy baby teeth is extremely important for the long-term health of permanent teeth. When baby teeth are damaged by decay, it can affect nutrition, speech development, and self-esteem, and can cause problems with spacing as permanent teeth grow in.”

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