

Nutrition, night feeding and dental care

How often should babies' teeth be brushed?

Mother's milk is the best nutrition available for infants and breast milk alone for the first six months, together with vitamin D administration, contains all the nutrients a baby needs for its growth and development. It is recommended that breast milk be part of the diet for the whole first year and even longer. As soon as the baby gets other food than breast milk, the risk of caries increases substantially. Toothbrushing is equally essential whether or not babies are reared on breast milk or formula and their teeth need to be brushed twice a day with 0.1% fluoride toothpaste once the first tooth becomes visible.

Breastfeeding

Night feeding is important for a nursling, especially during the first six months and even longer. Following teething it is important to brush the baby's teeth well before it receives its last feeding before the night and then again immediately in the morning since most nurslings fall asleep from breastfeeding and younger nurslings drink breast milk several times during the night. Any film that forms on the surface of the teeth needs to be removed and since saliva production is minimal during the night, this increases significantly the risk of tooth decay if care is not taken regarding the baby's dental care.



Babies that are fed formula or additive milk

Babies who have been fed formula milk in the first months may slowly be introduced to additive milk from six months of age. Following teething it is recommended to reduce night feeding, stop feeding milk by bottle during the night and give the baby water to drink instead. It is recommended to try to avoid babies from falling asleep after bottle feeding in evenings because saliva production is minimal at night which greatly increases the risk of tooth decay if their teeth are not brushed well before bedtime.



One should never feed pure fruit juice or other sweet drinks in a bottle to a baby, neither night or day, since sugar damages the teeth and fruit acid corrodes tooth enamel. It is advisable to accustom 6 months old babies to a sippy cup and to wean 12-18 months olds from bottle-feeding.

Toothbrushing is important

Toothbrushing is equally essential whether children are reared on breast milk or formula. Their teeth need to be brushed twice a day with 0.1% fluoride toothpaste once the first tooth becomes visible. The right amount of toothpaste corresponds to $\frac{1}{4}$ of the little finger's nail of a child younger than 3 years old. If a child has a pacifier, parents should avoid putting it in their own mouth, since that is how oral bacteria is transmitted from parent to child. A silicone pacifier is preferable as it is less conducive to bacteria growth than latex.



Videos showing the toothbrushing of children can be found on the Web:

<http://www.landlaeknir.is/tannheilsa>

Directorate of Health 2013