

## FEBRUARY: CHILDREN'S DENTAL HEALTH MONTH

One of the more serious dental problems related to dietary habits is “nursing decay. This condition occurs in young children who use a bottle containing soda like a pacifier or who are breast fed on demand – specifically at times normal feedings and throughout the night. According to Dr. Bell, D.D.S., Dentist and member of the Medical Staff at East Tennessee Children’s Hospital often develop numerous early lesions, most often involving the maxillary incisors (upper front teeth). Nursing practices such as these should be strongly avoided, and water encouraged for between meal drinking instead of milk or juice.



bottle”  
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other than  
Pediatric  
these children

Other guidelines that Children’s Hospital pediatricians and pediatric dentists recommend to parents are:

- If breast-feeding, avoid “on-demand” feeding or feeding during the night.
- Avoid bedtime bottles and the use of bottles as pacifiers.
- Wean baby from breast-feeding or the bottle by 12 months of age.
- Remember that medications may contain sugars and should be cleaned off teeth whenever possible.
- When a toothbrush is introduced, it should be soft-bristled and small enough to fit comfortably in a child’s mouth. Parents should begin brushing teeth as soon as they erupt.
- Limit “goeey” sweets that stick in the pits of back teeth, thereby increasing the possibility of decay. Also, some nutritious snacks such as raisins can stick in these areas and should be cleaned out by brushing.
- Care should be taken in the amount of fluoride ingestion. Because young children often swallow toothpaste, no more than a pea-sized amount should be dispensed onto the brush.
- Children should be seen by a dentist prior to their first birthday to assess cavity risk. Early examination and intervention with fluoride supplements, dietary changes, or other preventive measures can aid in the reduction of decay.
- Routine six-month dental examinations and cleanings should begin around 2½ to 3 years of age.

With children, prevention is always better than a cure. Promoting good dental health even before a child gets that first tooth will ensure a lifetime of beautiful smiles.

Along with keeping teeth clean, parents should remember that good dietary habits are essential for a healthy smile and a healthy child. A well-balanced diet is good for proper tooth development as well as for the overall health of the child, because food choices and eating patterns that are developed during childhood affect a person’s health and well being for life. In addition to good nutrition and proper oral hygiene, preventive measures such as water fluoridation and pit and fissure sealants also aid in keeping children’s teeth cavity free.

For more information on children’s dental health, visit the American Dental Association Web site at [www.ada.org](http://www.ada.org), the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry Web site at [www.aapd.org](http://www.aapd.org), the Children’s Hospital’s Web site at [www.etch.com](http://www.etch.com), or call the Children’s Hospital Community Relations Department at (865) 541-8165.