

# Protecting baby's teeth:

*What a dentist wants you to know*

"We are all born dentally healthy and our aim as parents and dentists is to keep them that way"

By Dr Angela Gilhespie, Author of "The ABC's of children's teeth – a 21<sup>st</sup> century guide for parents"

## Mums, your oral health is important

Caring for your child's mouth begins with caring for your own. If you are planning to become pregnant, or as soon as you become so, you should have a dental check-up. Hormonal changes during pregnancy impact on gum health making immaculate oral hygiene imperative. Recent research has shown that mothers with gum disease increase their risk of a pre-term or low birth weight baby. Your dentist or oral hygienist must discuss this with you.

Cravings and snacking during pregnancy can increase your risk of tooth decay. Try to have only 'tooth friendly' snacks such as milk, cheese, nuts and whole fruits and vegetables. Drink plenty of water. 'Morning sickness' (with vomiting) and gastric reflux pose a serious problem for teeth (dental erosion). GC Tooth Mousse with Recaldent™ is an excellent product to counteract this. (GC Tooth Mousse only available from dentists).

An interesting recent finding is that the baby's mouth bacteria are derived mainly from the mother (sorry, dads!) This is why bacterial levels in the mother's mouth must be kept low. This can be effectively done by frequently chewing Xylitol gum during and after pregnancy. Any tooth decay in the mother must be treated so that harmful, decay-causing bacteria are not transmitted to the baby.

## Cleaning baby's mouth starts from day one.

Mouth bacteria thrive from the start, so it is important that oral cleaning begins as soon as possible. This is best accomplished after each main feed when the gums are wiped with a moistened, gauze square. These

are bought at pharmacies and are dipped in plain, cooled boiled water. A smear of child's toothpaste can be applied to the gauze when the teeth appear (at about six months.) Alternatively, a finger brush can be used. You may need a dentist or hygienist to help you to introduce a regular toothbrush. GC Tooth Mousse should be applied to the teeth twice daily to protect the outer enamel from plaque acid attack.

## Don't start 'bad' habits.

Fruit juices and cold drinks, even diluted, are too acidic for baby's teeth. The enamel, as these teeth erupt, is "immature" and is extremely vulnerable to acid attack. These drinks, especially if given in a bottle



or sippy cup, will result in severe erosion and decay. Babies, if put down with a bottle of juice, will develop a comfort habit which may be impossible to break. Let's stop this habit by not starting it in the first place! Give only milk or plain, cooled boiled water in a bottle. The bottle should be replaced by a cup by one year of age.

## Don't give your child a "sweet" tooth.

Milk, fruits and vegetables are sweet on their own; they don't need sugars added to them. By adding sugars to foods, literally feeds mouth bacteria. In susceptible children, this may lead to severe tooth decay and abscesses.

## Start only "good" habits.

We're never going to stop a child getting sweets, but an 'after supper rule' may help you to control them. Sweets (including biscuits & cakes) are treats and cause least harm to teeth if given at the end of the main meal. Try to end each meal or snack with a small piece of cheese.

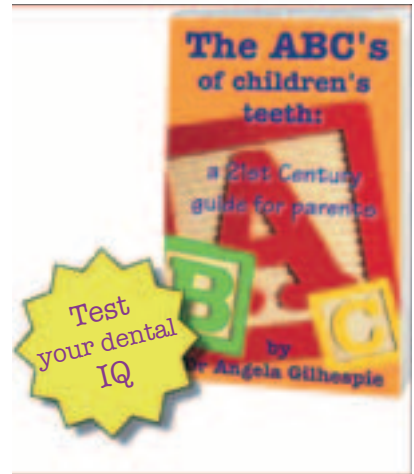
At night we have little saliva, Nature's 'cavity fighter', to protect and repair our teeth. This is why the most important clean of the day is before bedtime. All plaque must be removed by immaculate brushing and flossing. An application of GC Tooth Mousse provides minerals (calcium and phosphate) for tooth repair. Thereafter, only water is allowed.

## Moms: find a 'dental home' by age one.

Just as you find a "medical home" from birth for monitoring your child's physical health so, too, should you look for a "dental home" to care for your child's mouth. The key is to find a child-friendly environment where a pro-active, preventative approach exists. Tooth decay and gum disease are preventable diseases but parents need to be guided. Don't let toothache, or a visible hole, be the reason for your child's first dental visit.

For further information and any questions: visit  
[www.teethforlife.co.za](http://www.teethforlife.co.za)

## This book will change the way you think about teeth



### Answer True or False:

1. Baby teeth are not important as they fall out.
2. Brushing teeth prevents tooth decay.
3. Antibiotics are "bad" for teeth.
4. High fluoride is good for teeth.
5. A child can safely drink fruit juices from a bottle.

Answers: All are False statements

To find out more, read "The ABC's of Children's Teeth". This book was written to help new parents begin the dental care of their child. It is not a book about dentistry but, rather, how to prevent dental problems. This is a subject which has been neglected but has a profound impact on the child's health.

"The ABC's of Children's Teeth was written by Dr. Angela Gilhespie a dentist in private practice."

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