



Is Breast-feeding Linked to Tooth Decay?

There has been an increase in concern about breast-feeding at night and tooth decay, similar to "baby bottle tooth decay." As of yet, a valid link between nursing (at night or otherwise) and cavities has not been made and mothers should be encouraged to breast-feed as long as they wish.

Extensive research on human skulls (from 500 to 1000 years ago) shows that decay in children's teeth was rare. This was before the use of baby bottles, when all babies were breast-fed for an extended amount of time.

One of the reasons for nighttime bottles causing tooth decay is the pooling of liquid in baby's mouth (where the milk/juice bathes baby's teeth for a long period of time). Breast milk is not thought to pool in the baby's mouth the same way as bottle milk because the milk doesn't flow from the breast unless the baby is actively sucking, whereas with a bottle the liquid drips out with minimal sucking.

A human nipple also extends further back in the infant's mouth than a rubber bottle nipple, so all milk from the breast enters the baby's mouth far behind the teeth. If a baby is actively sucking, he also is swallowing, so pooling breast milk in the baby's mouth is not an issue.

A bacteria present in plaque, called strep mutans, is the cause of tooth decay. The bacteria use food sugars to produce acid - this acid directly causes the decay. This bacteria thrive in an environment of sugar, low amounts of saliva, and low pH.

Studies have been done on the effects of lactose (milk sugar, which breast milk does contain) on teeth. Studies have not been done on breast milk alone and the effects of the 400 components it contains. One of the components is lactoferrin, which actually kills strep mutans (the bacteria that causes tooth decay).

Breast-feeding for five minutes lowers the pH-level in a baby's mouth only slightly more than rinsing the mouth with water. Strep mutans bacteria cannot thrive at this level of pH.

The milk proteins in breast milk protect the enamel on the teeth and the antibacterial qualities in breast milk stop the bacteria from using the lactose in breast milk the same way as regular sugar. Studies done on soaking teeth in a variety of solutions showed that immersing teeth in breast-milk was practically identical to water and did not cause tooth decay.

Once your baby gets teeth, it's a good idea to brush your child's teeth twice daily. Do not allow your baby to carry a cup or bottle around during the day. This results in a constant "bathing" of your baby's teeth with whatever he/she is drinking. Decay is directly related to the amount of contact time of a sugary substance on teeth.

So if your child's dental problems are being blamed on breast-feeding, look elsewhere for the cause. Science says breast-feeding is not to blame.



Why is "Follow-up" Important at the Dentist Office?

Ever been asked by your dentist to come back in a week or two? There are many good reasons to return to the office in the time recommended by your dentist. Here are just a few:

1. Sutures (stitches) need to be removed after some types of dental extractions. This allows the dentist to check the area for healing as well as painlessly remove stitches.
2. Check on an abscessed tooth. The process is called "open and drain." An opening is placed on the tooth's surface. A temporary filling might be used. It is **very** important for the dentist to check on the tooth in a timely manner to see if the infection is gone from the area and begin the next step in the process of saving (or restoring) the tooth. This process is called root canal therapy or endodontics. This procedure is sometimes referred to a dental

Asthma and Secondhand Smoke

Strong evidence suggests that tobacco smoke is detrimental to the health of people with asthma, but Oregonians who have asthma smoke more than those who do not. Non-smokers with asthma are routinely exposed to secondhand tobacco smoke.

Tobacco smoke is one of the leading asthma irritants and has been causally linked to the development of asthma in infants. Tobacco smoke is responsible for the majority of asthma hospitalizations in children and contributes significantly to asthma symptoms. The effectiveness of

inhalants and daily medications used by asthmatics is severely reduced by exposure to tobacco smoke, whether firsthand or secondhand.

Women in Oregon are more likely to report having asthma than are men. Oregonians who smoke more than a pack a day are twice as likely to report having asthma as those who never smoke.

Woman who smoke heavily are 2° times as likely to have asthma as woman who never smoked and almost four times as likely to have it than heavy smokers who are male.

Infants born to mothers who smoked during pregnancy are more likely to develop asthma and other respiratory problems that those born to mothers who did not smoke.

Protect children from secondhand smoke and take it outside!

To learn about tobacco smoke and asthma, visit the Oregon Department of Human Service's Web site at <http://www.dhs.state.or.us/publichealth/asthma/tobacco.cfm>.

Moms and Babies Breastfeeding Circle

2nd Tuesday of each month
6 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.
Housing Department
Conference Room

Tooth Talk

by Linda Kreutzer, RDH



3. Root canal therapy sometimes requires several visits to the dental office. Although it sometimes may not seem like it, progress is being made. The tooth must be free from infection and become thoroughly cleaned and re-filled, which takes time. Please allow your dentist the number of visits it takes to do a great job for you. Even though the tooth no longer hurts, it's important to return to the dental office two or more times (in some cases) so the dentist can complete the root canal.
4. Temporary fillings and crowns are exactly what they are called - **temporary**. They are not strong enough to sustain chewing forces for any length of time. They can do a good job of "holding you over" for two or three weeks, but can cause problems if left in too long. It's possible to break off more tooth structure along with the temporary, resulting in root canal therapy or tooth extraction.
5. Denture and partial denture care. When new plates are made, the dentist always expects minor fitting adjustments to be necessary. Sore spots can develop on the gums and mouth if dentures and partials that fit improperly are worn too long. It's important to return to the dentist office within one week to ensure great fit without sore spots.
6. Get your teeth cleaned **twice** a year! This goes for people with healthy gums, too. If gum disease is a problem, it's necessary to see the hygienist three or even four times a year.

In the dental world, follow-up has many meanings, **all** of them important!