

# Does breast milk cause cavities in nursing infants?

By KIM GLOVER, R.D.H.

It's 2:45 a.m. Your baby just dropped off to sleep while nursing. You watch as her little mouth makes feeding motions in the air as you shift her into her crib. At times like this, you may wonder if you will have to limit breastfeeding after your baby has teeth. You may have already seen photos of the condition called Baby Bottle

six months, a year, or longer can be assured that their milk won't cause their babies to have tooth decay. In addition to all the prebiotics, probiotics, growth hormones, healthy fats and immunity codes that breast milk provides, it also has lactoferrin. Lactoferrin in breast milk actually protects the teeth from the bacteria that cause cavities.

Multiple studies in various countries over the last 25 years conclude that there seems to be no correlation between breast milk and dental cavities. International speaker and Kansas dentist Dr. Brian Palmer has studied prehistoric skulls, looking for dental decay.

He has found that prehistoric infants did not exhibit the tooth decay we see in modern times. He presumes that prehistoric babies and small children were breastfed several times a day, at all hours, and for years longer than most children are breastfed now. The lack of dental decay seen in these ancient skulls has lead Dr. Palmer to believe that breastfeeding was and is still safe for our children's teeth.

Elizabeth Michael is a lactation consultant and registered nurse at St Anthony Hospital in Pendleton. She explains that when a baby

nurses while properly positioned at the breast, the milk practically bypasses all of the teeth. The milk hits the soft palate (the soft tissue near the back of the roof of the mouth) first, and is swallowed. This is different than when a baby drinks from a bottle. Babies drink differently from an artificial nipple, causing the milk or formula to pool around the teeth during the feeding. Unfortunately, formula can cause tooth decay, as it does not have the protective properties for the teeth that breast milk has.

Breast milk does not cause tooth decay, but any baby can still get cavities if they are given formula or 100 percent fruit juice in a bottle or sippy cup. Liquid medications can also cause cavities. Practice good cleaning habits at home by using



## Young Children

gauze or a thin damp washcloth to swab baby's mouth out twice a day, whether she has teeth or not. Whenever possible, give medication well before bedtime, and chase it with water or breast milk so sugars do not remain in the mouth.

Hopefully, knowing that breast milk is safe for your baby's teeth, you'll have one less thing to worry about at 2:45 am.

*Kim Glover is a Registered Dental Hygienist at Broadway Family Dental Care ([www.bwaydental.com](http://www.bwaydental.com)) in Milton-Freewater.*



Tooth Decay (BBTD). BBTD is preventable condition, often requiring dental fillings, crowns or extractions while a small child is under general anesthesia. Can breast milk cause babies to get cavities?

If you are concerned that breastfeeding will cause your baby to have cavities, worry no longer. Moms who want to breastfeed past

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