

Severe Early Childhood Caries

1. Dr. Chan:

Mrs. Tung, your son's tooth decay is quite severe.

2. Mrs. Tung:

Dr. Chan, I just can't figure out why he has got so many carious teeth at such a young age. One by one, his teeth were decayed as soon as they were through. It is hurting him so much, I don't know how to handle the situation.

3. Dr. Chan:

What you have just described are the characteristics of Severe Early Childhood Caries. That is, the child's teeth get cavities soon after they are through. Usually it begins with the incisors, then following the order the teeth are through, other teeth are affected one by one.

4. Mrs. Tung:

What? **Severe Early Childhood Caries**?!

5. Dr. Chan:

Mrs. Tung, **Severe Early Childhood Caries** is due to improper dietary and feeding habits. Most of the food actually contained sugar, and the bacteria in the mouth metabolised the sugar to produce acid. The acid then dissolved the minerals on the tooth surface, and gradually a cavity was formed. Your son's condition needs special attention.

6. Mrs. Tung:

I see. He doesn't eat well, I thought his cavities were because of malnutrition. So, I fed him many times a day, hoping that he can gain more nutrients.

7. Dr. Chan:

If your child was being fed all the time, acid would have been produced continuously. Although saliva is able to neutralize the acid to protect the teeth, it takes a certain period of time to complete the process. If the frequency of feeding was too high, then acid would be continuously formed in the oral cavity, and the saliva would not be able to neutralise the acid. This would increase the chance of developing tooth decay.

Besides, some caregivers who lack proper knowledge in taking care of their babies will let their babies fall asleep with the bottles in their mouths in order to avoid disturbing their sleep. That's another main reason leading to **Severe Early Childhood Caries**.

8. Mrs. Tung:

Ah! That was the case, I used to let him sleep with a bottle in his mouth, no wonder his teeth suffered from severe decay.

9. Dr. Chan:

Right! Your son's previous feeding habit and present dietary habit were both incorrect, that's why his teeth ended up like this.

10. Mrs. Tung:

I wish I had known this earlier! Now I have another new-born baby, what should I do to prevent him from getting **Severe Early Childhood Caries**?

11. Dr. Chan:

It is quite simple, you just have to focus on three areas:

(1) Feeding and dietary habits

Firstly, do not let your baby fall asleep while sucking on milk or flavored drinks. When he reaches around 7 to 9 months old should begin learning to drink water or other beverages from a cup and has scheduled meals of 6 to 8 times a day. After he is 12 months old, ensure he has no more than 6 meals a day at regular intervals. Once the child is 2 years old, he should have three well-portioned main meals each day, with snacks

offered only as needed between meals. Only water should be consumed for thirst between meals.

(2) Oral cleaning

From the baby's birth, dampen a piece of gauze, cotton or a handkerchief with plain water every day to wipe his mouth. Once the milk teeth start to erupt, continue to wipe his teeth to establish a daily oral hygiene routine. You can also try using a soft-bristled toothbrush to brush your child's teeth.

When your child is 2 years of age, let him learn to brush his teeth in the morning and before bed at night. However, since a child's manual dexterity is not fully developed at this age, you should assist him in brushing his teeth every night to ensure they are cleaned thoroughly. Additionally, toothpaste should be used twice a day. In general, for children younger than 3 years of age, a smear or rice-sized amount of 1000ppm fluoridated toothpaste (approximately 0.1g toothpaste which contains about 0.1mg fluoride) should be used for brushing in the morning and before bed at night; for children aged 3 to 6 years, a pea-sized amount of 1000ppm fluoridated toothpaste (approximately 0.25g toothpaste which contains about 0.25mg fluoride) should be used for brushing in the morning and before bed at night. This is to prevent children from swallowing too much fluoride, which may affect the development of the permanent teeth.

(3) Regular dental check-up

After the first tooth erupts in a child or before the age of one, you should bring him to see a dentist for his first dental check-up. The dentist can provide early guidance on preventing dental diseases for the child. After that, you should take the child for a dental check-up at least once a year.

12. Mrs. Tung:

Dr. Chan, you have given me a very detailed advice, I think I know what to do from now on. Thank you!