

## Early Childhood Caries

Dr. Chan:

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

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.

Dr. Chan:

What you have just described are the characteristics of 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.

Mrs. Tung:

What? Early Childhood Caries?!

Dr. Chan:

Mrs. Tung, 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.

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.

Dr. Chan:

If your child was being fed all the time, acid would have been produced continuously. Although saliva is able to neutralise 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 new mothers who are inexperienced 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 Early Childhood Caries.

Mrs. Tung:

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

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.

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 Early Childhood Caries?

Dr. Chan:

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

1. Feeding and dietary habits

First of all, don't let your baby fall asleep while sucking from a nursing bottle. When he reaches 9 month-old, help him quit using the bottle and switch to a weaning cup, and have no more than 6 to 8 regular meals a day. After weaning, your child need to eat with sufficient quantities of food during regular meals. Try to give him no more than one snack in between meals only when he is hungry.

2. Oral cleaning

It is desirable to start cleaning your baby's mouth before his teeth are through by gently wiping along the upper and lower gums with a piece of damp gauze soaked with drinking water. This will facilitate the establishment of an oral cleaning habit in him.

Meanwhile, you should help your child brush his teeth using a toothbrush with small brush head and soft bristles. At this stage, toothpaste is not needed yet.

When your child is 2 years of age, let him learn to brush his teeth. If he knows how to spit water out, fluoride toothpaste in the size of a

pea can be used when he brushes his teeth in the morning and before bed at night. However, since the manual dexterity of a child is not fully developed at this age, you should help him brush his teeth in order to have his teeth thoroughly cleaned.

3. Regular dental check-up

Six months after the first tooth is through or when your child reaches the age of one, you should bring him to the dentist for his first dental check-up. The dentist can counsel you on how to prevent dental diseases. After that, your child should have a dental check-up at least once a year.

Mrs. Tung:

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