

Early Childhood Caries (ECC)

The most prevalent disease amongst children, worldwide!

Caries Disease (that causes tooth decay) is a bacterial infection and is 100% preventable if we start with babies.

My cavity-prone patients often say something like this: "It's been this way since I was a little kid. I just inherited bad teeth." I like to answer... "It's much more likely that you inherited bad bugs!" The truth is, we're born with a relatively sterile mouth (and gut), but on our way into the world through the vaginal canal, we get a mouthful of mom's gut bacteria, and then her skin bacteria from day-one of breastfeeding.

Saliva contains another huge ration of cavity "bugs"—both helpful and harmful. The mouth is a home to hundreds of identifiable bacteria strains which we transmit to infants through a single drop of saliva...on a spoon, cup, pacifier, juicy kiss or licked index finger that swoops in to clean up a baby's mouth. If mom or dad (or any primary caregiver) inoculates a baby with one or

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two of the most significant acid-producing bacteria strains, it influences ongoing cavity proneness.

Some bugs, like Streptococcus Mutans and Lactobacillus Acidophilus, gobble up sugar even more eagerly than we do, and then excrete acid. We tell our kiddos "These bugs eat sugar and pee on your teeth," which seems to gross them out, at least for the moment.

To buffer (neutralize) the acid, calcium leaches out of enamel, leaving a white, decalcified weak spot. Then it eventually becomes a divot and the sugar-loving bacteria are allowed to move their party into the cave where they become protected from a toothbrush and floss. Incidentally, the word *cavity* shares a root with the word *cave* and is derived from the Latin word *cavus*, which means hollow.

With an ample supply of sugary and acidic foods and beverages at hand, cavity bugs flourish and keep pouring out acid, until they burn their way through the enamel to the inner layer of tooth structure called dentin. Beyond dentin lies the pulp chamber, which houses the nerve and blood vessel. Ultimately, Early Childhood Caries often leads to tooth death, pain and infection.

To prevent ECC for your child, avoid swapping spit from age 6 months to 3 ½ years old, and by all means aim for a sugar-deprived kitchen.



Please help us welcome our new partner in Total Health Dentistry...

Dr. Tracey Epley!

Tracey shares our passion for optimal health from infancy to elderly. We are thrilled to have her on our team!



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