

## Common Infant and Childhood Problems

(Birth – 5 years)

# Tooth Decay

### ✿ What is Tooth Decay?

Tooth decay, which is also called a cavity, happens when a tooth breaks down. Germs, sugary foods and drinks, and poor tooth care can lead to tooth decay.



### ✿ How do I Prevent Tooth Decay?

#### **Take good care of your teeth.**

- Germs that cause cavities can be passed from person to person in saliva.
- Caregivers should brush and floss their own teeth daily and visit a dentist twice a year.
- Do not share forks, spoons, cups, or toothbrushes with your infant or child or chew his food.

#### **Take good care of your child's teeth.**

- Birth to 12 months – wipe baby's mouth with a clean washcloth. When you see the first tooth, brush baby's teeth daily with a soft toothbrush and water.
- 12 to 24 months – brush baby's teeth with a 'smear' of toothpaste 2 times a day, after breakfast and before bed.
- 2 to 5 years – brush child's teeth with a 'pea-sized' amount of toothpaste 2 times a day, after breakfast and before bed.

(continued on other side)



## How do I Prevent Tooth Decay?

(continued from other side)

- Start flossing when the sides of the teeth cannot be cleaned by a toothbrush.

### **Get regular care from a dentist.**

- Have your doctor check your child's teeth and gums during well-child visits.
- Take your child to see the dentist starting at 6 months of age.

### **Avoid habits that cause cavities.**

- Do not put a baby to bed with food or a bottle of milk or juice.
- Avoid constant snacking and drinking between meals.
- Teach infants to drink from a cup instead of a bottle by 12 months of age.
- Limit juice to 4 ounces per day, and do not give juice in a bottle.

**Offer your child a well-balanced diet** with a variety of foods and healthy snacks. Limit sweet or sticky sugars and starches.

**Offer water to your child.** Tap water may have fluoride which protects teeth. Your child's dentist can tell you if your child needs an additional fluoride supplement.



For more information about oral health, visit the American Dental Association [www.ada.org/public.aspx](http://www.ada.org/public.aspx) or the American Academy of Pediatrics [www.aap.org/topics.html](http://www.aap.org/topics.html).