

Tiny teeth in tatters

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The tiny teeth of some of our toddlers are rotting and dental researchers at the University of Sydney are poised to start the second phase of a long-term study to find out why.

Led by Dr. Amit Arora from the University's Faculty of Dentistry, the two-year project, which will get under way next year thanks to government funding announced last week, will investigate the relationship between breastfeeding, bottle feeding, food and [beverage intake](#), dental health and obesity, revealing a wider understanding of kids' overall health.

Dr. Arora, a lecturer in [oral health](#), says [dental decay](#) and obesity in early childhood is a significant health concern in Australian [children](#).

"The Child Dental Health Survey of Australia reported that 45 percent of five-year-olds had one or more decayed or missing teeth and 10 percent of those children examined were found to have more than seven decayed teeth. Also 40 percent of the five to six-year-olds who participated in the survey had up to five missing or decayed [teeth](#)," says Dr. Arora.

Data from the Center for Oral Health Strategy indicates that despite water fluoridation, [dental caries](#) remain a major public health problem, particularly in disadvantaged areas.

"This is a huge burden of disease when one considers there are only 20 [baby teeth](#) in the whole mouth," says Dr. Arora.

"From previous research we have unfortunately found that the incidence of decay in small children is disproportionately higher in children from lower [socioeconomic groups](#)," he adds.

"This can have an overwhelming impact on the children and their families in terms of its effect on their growth, development, nutrition, ability to socialise and function well at school."

Previous research has suggested there may be an association between dental caries and obesity in early childhood as they share common risk factors, mainly diet. But there have been only a few longitudinal research studies into the common origins of dental caries and obesity.

Dr. Arora says the project will start at the infant phase and research a child's diet and dental hygiene through to the age of three.

While it is widely recognised that breastfeeding provides terrific nutrition for babies and has been generally considered to protect against obesity, on-demand breastfeeding has been associated with poorer oral health outcomes.

"We are aiming to provide evidence of the relationships between feeding, oral hygiene practices and physical activity for children aged between zero and 36 months," says Dr. Arora.

One of the first of its kind, the study, called *Infant Feeding including Breastfeeding, and Early Childhood Food and Beverage Intake: Relationships with [Early Childhood](#) Caries and Obesity*, received funding in the latest round of National Health and Medical Research Council grants announced earlier this month.

The results will provide longitudinal evidence in Australian children and explore the association between breastfeeding and oral health, and

between obesity and dental caries.

Provided by University of Sydney

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