

Looking after your child's oral health

Information for parents and guardians

Who should brush children's teeth?

It is best to supervise tooth brushing until your child is seven or eight years old, either by brushing their teeth yourself or, if they brush their own teeth, by observing how they do it and helping as required.

What is fluoride?

Fluoride is a natural mineral and can be found in some foods and water supplies. Studies show that fluoride is proven to help reduce the risk of tooth decay in both children and adults.

Children up to the age of six can use a smear of fluoride toothpaste containing at least 1,000ppm (parts per million) fluoride.

Children from the age of seven should use a pea-sized quantity of fluoride toothpaste containing 1350-1500ppm fluoride. Check the toothpaste packet if you are unsure, or ask your dentist.

Encourage your child not to rinse their mouth with water straight after brushing their teeth as this removes the fluoride that the toothpaste has left on their teeth.

How else can I help protect my child's teeth?

The main cause of tooth decay is sugar, eating too much of it too frequently.

Every time something sugary is consumed, it starts to break down the mineral surface of the teeth. The teeth can recover after eating something sugary but this can take hours. If sugary foods/drinks are being consumed regularly throughout the day the teeth won't have time to repair themselves. This can lead to acid erosion of the teeth.

It is best to keep sugary foods and drinks to meal times only to limit the sugar/acid attacks on the teeth.

Tooth friendly snack ideas:

- ✓ cubes of cheese
- ✓ plain popcorn
- ✓ carrot or cucumber sticks
- ✓ hummus and pitta breads
- ✓ plain/natural yoghurt
- ✓ breadsticks

During the first year of a child's life the foundation for healthy permanent teeth is established. Poor diet, inadequate tooth brushing and excessive amount of sugars in the diet have been strongly linked to tooth decay.

When should I start taking my child to the dentist?

It is a good idea to take your child to the dentist when their first milk teeth appear. They will then be able to become familiar with the surroundings and get to know the dentist. The dentist can also help prevent decay and detect any oral health problems at an early stage.

Currently NHS dental care is free for children.

Which toothbrush should I buy for my child?

There are many different types of toothbrushes available. It is best to get a small headed brush with soft bristles. It is advisable to change their toothbrush every 6-9 months to ensure it is maintaining its effectiveness, or before if the bristles become visibly frayed.

Thumb/finger sucking

This is a common habit that occurs in infants. Children usually give up thumb/finger sucking by the age of four.

If the habit continues past the age when their permanent teeth start to erupt, it could potentially affect the roof of their mouth and/or cause crooked teeth to develop. These results vary and influencing factors are the frequency, duration, intensity, and position of the thumb/finger in the child's mouth.

Thumb/finger sucking can have an effect on the jaws and also on a child's speech. Both of these can, potentially, cause long-term problems.

Recommendations for breaking the habit:

- timing is key – attempt this during a less stressful time
- try to motivate your child (show examples of what could happen to their teeth and fingers/thumbs)
- there are a variety of deterrent methods and products available, for example a foul tasting varnish to paint on the finger/thumb, a sock or mitten on the hand to prevent the habit at night
- you can ask your dentist for advice and your pharmacist for recommended products

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