

Looking after your children's teeth

Dental decay is the most common oral disease affecting children and young people in UK, yet it is largely preventable.

The following key points provide a summary of the simple steps that you and your family can take every day to protect and improve your child's dental health.

Evidence tells us that tooth brushing with fluoride toothpaste is one of the most effective ways of preventing dental decay. Gum disease can also be prevented by regular thorough tooth brushing to remove plaque.

Top tips for tooth brushing

- Start brushing your child's teeth as soon as the first baby tooth appears (usually at about 6 months of age) and brush all tooth surfaces and the gum line where plaque gathers.
- Parents/carers should brush or help their child in brushing their teeth until they are at least seven years old. This helps to supervise the amount of toothpaste they use and make sure that the teeth are thoroughly cleaned.
- Brush the teeth at least twice a day, last thing at night before bed and at least on one other occasion. Brushing at bedtime ensures the fluoride continues working while your child is asleep and when saliva flow decreases.
- When choosing a toothbrush for your child, choose a small headed toothbrush with medium texture bristles. Use either a manual or powered (rotation action), However, more important is using the brush effectively at least twice a day.

More information on Page 2

Public Health England

For additional fact sheets see www.ihv.org.uk

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The most important thing you can do to prevent dental decay is use appropriate fluoride toothpaste

- Toothpastes containing 1350 – 1500 parts per million fluoride (ppmF-) are the most effective at helping to prevent tooth decay.
- The amount of fluoride that is in the toothpaste can be found on the side of the tube.
- For children under three years old use a smear of toothpaste containing no less than 1000 ppm F- (Fig 1).
- Children between three and six years old should use a pea-sized amount of toothpaste containing more than 1000 ppm fluoride (Fig 2).
- Spit out excess toothpaste after brushing but do not rinse with water as this washes away the fluoride.
- Do not let your child lick or eat the toothpaste from the tube.
- For older children, disclosing tablets can help to show where areas of the tooth surface have been missed when brushing.

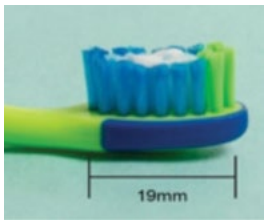


Fig 1: Smear



Fig 2: Pea-size

Healthy eating

Sugar consumption is the major cause of tooth decay. Each time we eat sugary food and drink, the bacteria in dental plaque produce acid that attacks teeth. If we eat or drink sugary foods frequently throughout the day, we have more 'acid attacks' which can lead to tooth decay. The following points will help give your child a healthy start:

- Breast milk is the only food or drink babies need for around the first six months of their life. Formula milk is the only suitable alternative to breast milk.
- Once you introduce solid foods, you should continue to breastfeed or give your baby infant formula alongside an increasingly varied diet until they're at least one year old. Cows' milk as a drink can be introduced from 12 months.
- Only breast or formula milk or cooled, boiled water should be given in bottles.
- From the age of six months old bottle fed babies should be introduced to drinking from a non valved free-flow cup. Bottle feeding should be discouraged from 12 months old.
- Only give water or milk between meals and do not add sugar or honey to foods or drinks.
- The frequency and amount of sugary foods and drinks should be reduced. Cut down on added or 'free sugars' (sugar added to food and drinks as well as naturally occurring sugar in unsweetened fruit juices, honey and syrups. It does not include the sugars naturally found in milk and milk products and in whole fruit and vegetables).
- We should restrict the amount of 'free' sugars we eat daily to less than 5% of total dietary energy. The recommended maximum intake of free sugars is no more than 19g per day = 5 sugar cubes for 4-6 year olds, 24g per day = 6 sugar cubes for 6-10 years olds and 30g per day = 7 sugar cubes for 11 years and over.
- Avoid sugary foods and drinks just before bedtime.
- Only give sweet foods including dried fruit and fruit juice at mealtimes. Fruit juice counts towards 5 a day but even unsweetened fruit juice is sugary so limit the amount to no more than 150 mls a day from fruit juice, smoothies or both.

More information on Page 3

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- Encourage your child to eat a healthy balanced diet rich in fruit, vegetables and starchy foods and some proteins and milk and dairy products but low in fats, sugar and salt.
- Always ask for and use sugar-free medicines.

Visiting the dentist

- Take your child to the dentist as soon as the first teeth erupt and the dental team can give you the appropriate oral health advice for your child. Ask your dentist about fluoride varnish.
- Mums are entitled to free NHS treatment during pregnancy and until their child is one year old, and children are entitled to free NHS treatment.

Public Health England Delivering better oral health: an evidence -based toolkit for prevention Third Edition (2014) bit.ly/1WqJL9C

Information on sugar swaps www.nhs.uk/change4life

NHS Choices bit.ly/1M41gYo

Public Health England (2015) Why 5%? An explanation of SACN's recommendations about sugars and health. bit.ly/1MqUqLV

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