

GROWING UP WITH HEALTHY TEETH



A guide for parents and carers of
children between 2 and 11 years old



A lovely smile with sparkling teeth looks great and will give a child confidence. Fortunately you can keep them in tip-top condition, so get your children into the good habits outlined in this leaflet, and they will have healthy teeth for life.

THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM

We all know about tooth decay. It happens when the bacteria in the mouth produce more acid attacks than our teeth can cope with. These attacks result from plaque bacteria feeding on the small amounts of sugars and starches from our diet that are left on our teeth between brushings.

Another less well known problem is tooth erosion, where the surface enamel of the tooth is directly dissolved away by acids. These acids can come from our food and drink but also from stomach acids, for example when someone is sick.

Both dental decay and erosion can make teeth more sensitive to hot and cold foods and needs to be treated if severe. Fortunately the following simple measures will help to avoid both of these problems.

An adult should supervise or brush a child's teeth with a fluoride toothpaste, first thing in the morning and before going to bed.



BRUSH UP THAT SMILE

WHICH TOOTHBRUSH?

A child's toothbrush needs to be fairly soft, and small enough to reach all the nooks and crannies of the mouth. It should be changed about every three months or as soon as it becomes worn. Soak it in warm water for a few minutes before brushing to soften the bristles further.

TOOTHPASTE MATTERS

Fluoride works to strengthen tooth enamel against acid attacks. Children under 3 can use a small smear of the families' toothpaste (containing at least 1,000ppm fluoride). Between 3 and 6 years old they should use a pea-sized amount of toothpaste containing

1,350-1,500ppm fluoride. Toothpaste with less fluoride is not as effective at preventing decay.

BRUSH TWICE A DAY

Teeth need to be cleaned first thing in the morning and last thing at night. Spend at least 2 minutes brushing the teeth and gums, paying particular focus on the back molars.

Children under six should practice cleaning their teeth themselves, but as they do not yet have the physical skills to do a thorough job, it is important that you brush their teeth gently yourself at least once a day. Older children may still need a little encouragement and supervision.

WHAT AND HOW WE EAT

Tooth decay is caused by the bacteria feeding off the fermentable starches and sugars in the mouth left after we eat. These bacteria produce acids which damage teeth.

Erosion is an issue that occurs when too many acidic foods and drinks are consumed frequently throughout the day.

Dental decay and erosion can be painful and unsightly, and can lead to tooth loss. Thankfully these are easily prevented and managed if detected early.

WHAT THEY EAT AND DRINK

All sources of fermentable starches and sugars; including bread, crisps, fruit juices, honey and food or drinks containing them, can feed the plaque bacteria which cause acid attacks and result in dental decay.

Similarly any food or drink containing acids can directly affect teeth and can contribute to tooth erosion. These include fruit juices, squashes, all types of fizzy drinks, fruit, yoghurt, pickles and even tomato sauce!

However, if you follow good dental hygiene advice these do not need to be avoided and can be enjoyed as part of a healthy balanced diet and active lifestyle. See below to find out how to include them sensibly so that the teeth can cope.

For teeth, how often you eat is VERY important.



HOW OFTEN?

Eating frequency

Almost every time you eat, your teeth will be affected. The good news is that teeth can cope with acid attacks as long as they have time to recover and repair themselves between bouts of eating and drinking. Eating no more than four times a day is about right, for example three meals and a snack. Try to keep sweet foods, soft drinks and fruit juices limited to mealtimes.

If your child likes frequent drinks, give milk or water at other times. It is also important that children do not hold drinks in their mouths or swish them through their teeth.

Get into the habit of eating three regular meals and only one snack a day – and remember to only take water to bed.



Bedtime

During sleep, teeth are especially vulnerable to acid attacks as saliva flow, which repairs tooth damage, slows down. This means any starches, sugars or acid in the mouth will do more harm. So make sure that once your children have cleaned their teeth before bed, they do not have any more food or drink apart from water. Using a fluoride toothpaste twice a day protects teeth from the acids the bacteria in the mouth produces, so remember not to rinse with water after brushing teeth in the evening.

CONSULT THE EXPERTS

Start early – you can register your child with a dentist soon after birth, and is free up until the age of 18. Taking children regularly from a young age reduces the chance of them being worried about seeing the dentist and will get any problems spotted early and treated.

So, don't wait until your child has a toothache before going to the dentist. Find one who is good with children and go regularly. Use it as a chance to consult an expert if you have any questions or worries about your children's teeth. The dentist or hygienist can show you how to brush teeth properly and advise whether your child needs any special protection against decay. Also if you think your child's teeth are crooked the dentist will be able to tell you what can be done.

KEY FACTS

- Brush first thing in the morning and last thing at night with fluoride toothpaste every day for at least 2 minutes each time.
- Well brushed teeth can cope with four separate eating and drinking occasions a day, for example three meals and a snack, and still be healthy.
- Eat or drink all-in-one go rather than nibbling or sipping over a long period.
- Don't swish soft drinks between and around the teeth.
- No food in bed and only water to drink.
- Make friends with the dentist and visit regularly.



Unfortunately dentists don't often see young children until they already have dental problems or pain.



"As a parent myself, I know the difficulties of trying to balance a child's desire to eat sweets, snacks and drinks with my concern to help them maintain healthy teeth. This leaflet provides parents with sensible and practical advice on ways to help reduce the risk of tooth decay in their children."

Professor Susan Higham

Professor of Oral Biology,
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University of Liverpool.

A printable pdf of this leaflet is available for Nutrition and Health Professionals free of charge at www.sugarnutrition.org.uk