



## A quick guide to a healthy mouth in children

This factsheet gives a summary of the simple steps that parents, carers and children can take every day to protect and improve their oral health. The evidence based advice is from [Delivering Better Oral Health](#).

### Brushing children's teeth

- start brushing as soon as the first tooth appears (usually at about 6 months of age), at least twice a day with fluoride toothpaste last thing at night and on at least one other occasion
- brushing at bedtime is important as it makes sure that the fluoride continues to protect the teeth while your child is asleep
- parents/carers should brush or help their child to brush their teeth until they are at least seven years old to make sure the teeth are cleaned properly, to supervise the amount of toothpaste used and to prevent licking or eating the toothpaste
- brush your child's teeth thoroughly, cleaning all surfaces of the teeth
- for older children disclosing tablets can help to show if any plaque is left on the teeth
- choose a toothbrush with a small head and medium-textured bristles, a manual or electric toothbrush can be used
- For the maximum prevention of tooth decay for children aged 0-6 years use toothpastes containing 1350-1500 parts per million (ppm) fluoride
- the amount of fluoride that is in the toothpaste can be found on the side of the tube or on the packaging
- for children under three years old use a smear of toothpaste containing no less than 1000 ppm fluoride (see Figure 1)
- children between three and six years old should use a pea-sized amount of toothpaste containing more than 1000 ppm fluoride (see Figure 2)
- encourage your child to spit out the toothpaste after brushing and do not let them rinse out with water as this will wash away the fluoride and reduces how well it works - spit don't rinse

- for children who may have difficulties brushing their teeth such as those with special needs, toothbrush adaptations are available.

**Figure 1**



**smear for 0 – 3 year olds**

**Figure 2**



**pea-sized blob for 3–6 year olds**

In addition, for older children (aged 12 years to 17 years)

- as part of a daily oral health routine in addition to brushing, it is important to clean between the teeth using interdental brushes. Some teenagers may not have large enough spaces in between their teeth to use an interdental brush so flossing can be a useful alternative
- the dental team will show you how best to clean between your teeth
- If you have an orthodontic brace clean your teeth and appliance carefully as shown by the dental team

### Healthy eating advice:

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.

### Remember that for babies:

- 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
- from the age of six months, bottle-fed babies should be introduced to drinking from a free-flow cup. Bottle feeding should be discouraged from 12 months old
- only breast or formula milk or cooled, boiled water should be given in bottles
- only milk or water should be drunk between meals and avoid adding sugar to foods or drinks for your baby

## For all children:

- reduce the amount and frequency of having foods and drinks that contain sugar, only give sweet foods including dried fruit at mealtimes
- squashes sweetened with sugar, fizzy drinks, soft drinks and juice drinks have no place in a child's daily diet
- limit the amount of fruit juice and/or smoothies your child drinks to a maximum of 150 mls (one portion) in total per day and drink it with meals to reduce the risk of tooth decay
- always ask for sugar-free medicines

## Visiting the dentist:

- take your child to see the dentist as soon as their teeth start to appear, and visit regularly, as often as your dentist recommends
- ask your dentist about fluoride varnish - all children over 3 years should have this applied to their teeth. If younger children are at particular risk of tooth decay the dentist may apply to their teeth.
- NHS dental treatment is free for children under 18 or under 19 and in qualifying full-time education
- women are entitled to free NHS dental treatment during pregnancy and any treatment commenced before their child's first birthday

## Find out more

For further information about how to look after your child's teeth, visit:

[www.nhs.uk/Conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/Pages/looking-after-your-infants-teeth.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/Pages/looking-after-your-infants-teeth.aspx)

To find out how much total sugar is in your food and drink

[www.nhs.uk/change4life-beta/campaigns/sugar-smart/home](http://www.nhs.uk/change4life-beta/campaigns/sugar-smart/home)

To find an NHS dentist visit NHS Choices

[www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/AboutNHSservices/dentists/Pages/find-an-NHS-dentist.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/AboutNHSservices/dentists/Pages/find-an-NHS-dentist.aspx)

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