

## Oral health advice for your child



### **When should I start brushing my child's teeth?**

As soon as the first tooth starts to appear.

It is recommended that twice a day you carefully wipe the tooth using a cotton bud with a smear of fluoride toothpaste. The recommended fluoride content for children under 3 years old is no less than **1000 ppmf (parts per million of fluoride)**. This amount level can be found on the back of the tube normally in small writing.

As your child develops so will their dentition and by the age of 3 years old they normally have all 20 baby teeth. Baby teeth are called by the letters **a, b, c, d,** and **e** and just like adult teeth they have a blood supply, nerve and roots. Unlike adult teeth they are much softer and so can be more susceptible to tooth decay. From the age of 6 years old your child will start to develop their first adult molars; these are called the **sixes**. By 14 years old normally all baby teeth have shed and have been replaced by adult teeth. The only teeth then left to erupt are the **wisdom teeth**, which normally appear from age 21, but this is just a guide as they sometimes don't erupt until a person is much older.

## Brushing your child's teeth

It is recommended that you brush your child's teeth up to the age of 7 years old. This is because their manual dexterity is not normally developed enough to be able to clean their own teeth effectively. You often find that children are good at brushing the front teeth but tend to miss the back teeth. The recommended fluoride content for children of 3 years and over is 1450 ppmf, which is adult toothpaste.



## What is fluoride?

Fluoride is a naturally-occurring mineral found in drinking water and many foods.

Fluoride has been proven to help strengthen the enamel of the teeth and fight the bacteria that produce acids which can lead to tooth decay. The grooves of the developing teeth of children that use a fluoride toothpaste tend to be more shallow, helping to make the removal of plaque easier.

## What is plaque?

Plaque is made up of bacteria and is a sticky white film that continuously forms on the teeth.

The plaque bacteria feed on the sugars that we have in our diet and squirt out an acid as a waste product that softens the enamel of our teeth.

## **What is tooth decay?**

Tooth decay is the destruction of tooth tissue and it is caused by the frequency of sugar in our diet and the ineffective removal of plaque from the teeth.

It is recommended that we try and keep our sugar intake to meal times only and choose healthier snacks in between meals.



## **Babies**

It is recommended that you breastfeed your baby (if able) or give formula milk exclusively for the first six months, introducing weaning food from six months onwards. Weaning foods recommended can be mashed bananas, apple, pear, cooked potato, parsnip and other vegetables, and baby cereal mixed with breast milk or formula. You can get more information from your midwife and health visitor regarding breastfeeding and weaning.

When it comes to the care of the teeth it is important that your child does not have too much sugar in their diet, avoiding any sugary drinks in bottles and sippy cups. The safest drinks for your child's teeth are plain tap water and plain cow's milk. Drinks that claim to be sugar-free or no added sugar tend to have sweeteners added, which can have an acidic effect on the teeth. We recommend avoiding all fizzy drinks as they have no nutritional value and the acid in the drink can cause erosion of the enamel.

Food that is aimed at children can often contain a lot of sugar, for example child-sized yoghurts and packet raisins. For tooth-friendly snacks you could choose plain yoghurt, cheese, fruit in its original form, vegetable sticks, bread and butter, unsalted crackers and rice cakes.



## Choosing the right toothbrush and toothpaste

There are so many different brands of children's toothbrushes and toothpastes it can be a bit mind-boggling.

For babies you can use a baby finger toothbrush. Made of silicone, they fit over the finger and have soft silicone bristles to clean the teeth, massage the gums and tooth rims. They are also very useful for when your baby is teething.

As more teeth develop, swap for a small-headed soft baby toothbrush.

Twelve months to 3 years: swap for a slightly larger head.

3 to 5 years: swap for a slightly firmer head.

6+ years: slightly larger head again.

Children's toothbrushes will often have an age guide on them which is handy if you get stuck.

Children's toothpaste often come in fruity flavours as children can sometimes struggle with the mint flavour. Like the toothbrushes, these quite often have an age guide as well.

Up to 3 years old: a smear of toothpaste on the brush.

3+ years: a pea-sized amount on the brush.

If your child struggles with the mint flavour, squashing the toothpaste into the brush can help so they don't get that instant minty hit.

It is recommended that you brush your child's teeth for **two minutes** using small circular motions, paying attention to the back teeth. Once they have finished, get them to spit the toothpaste out but not rinse, as it's important that the fluoride in the toothpaste stays in contact with the teeth for as long as possible.

Two minutes can seem like an age to a small child – you can make it more fun by playing one of the many different toothbrush songs or videos that are available online.

