

## Helping your child at home

### *Looking after your children's teeth*



### *Keep your child's smile healthy*

You are the best person to help your child to understand the importance of keeping their teeth clean and fresh. Encourage them to brush regularly (using some of the tips below) and talk to them about the effects diet and lifestyle can have on their teeth and gums.

Did you know that plaque can start to form on young teeth as soon as they emerge, and it's important to implement a good oral health routine early – starting with that first tooth.

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

Prevention is always better than a cure, and regular check-ups at a Dentist for your child are invaluable for halting tooth decay and gum disease, maintaining a bright smile into adulthood.

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.
- You can start brushing your baby's teeth as soon as they start to come through. Use a baby toothbrush with a tiny smear of fluoride toothpaste.
- Don't worry if you don't manage to brush much at first. The important thing is to get your baby used to brushing their teeth as part of their daily routine. You can help by setting a good example and letting them see you brushing your own teeth.

### *Tooth brushing tips for babies and children*

- Use a tiny smear of toothpaste for babies and toddlers up to 3 years old, and a pea-sized amount for children aged 3 to 6 years.
- Gradually start brushing your child's teeth more thoroughly, covering all the surfaces of the teeth. Do it at least twice a day: just before bed and at another time that fits in with your routine.
- Not all children like having their teeth brushed, so you may have to keep trying. Make it into a game or brush your own teeth at the same time and then help your child finish their own.
- The easiest way to brush a baby's teeth is to sit them on your knee, with their head resting against your chest. With an older child, stand behind them and tilt their head backwards.
- Brush the teeth in small circles, covering all the surfaces, and encourage your child to spit the toothpaste out afterwards. There's no need to rinse with water, as this will wash away the fluoride.

- Supervise brushing to make sure your child gets the right amount of toothpaste and they're not eating or licking toothpaste from the tube.
- Carry on helping your child brush their teeth until you're sure they can do it well enough themselves. This will normally be until they're at least 7.

### *Taking your child to the dentist*

- NHS dental treatment for children is free. Take your child with you when you go for your own dental appointments, so they get used to the idea.
- 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.
- To find a dentist, you can use the 'find a dentist - NHS ([www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk))' ask at your local clinic, or contact NHS England on 0300 311 22 3 or email [england.contactus@nhs.net](mailto:england.contactus@nhs.net).

### *Let's talk about sugar*

- Sugar causes tooth decay. It's not just about the amount of sugar in sweet food and drinks, but how long and how often the teeth are in contact with sugar.
- Lollipops and sweet drinks in a formula bottle are particularly damaging, because they bathe the teeth in sugar for long periods of time. The acid in drinks like fruit juice and squash can harm teeth as well.
- The sugars found naturally in whole fruit and milk are less likely to cause tooth decay, so you don't need to cut down on these types of sugars.

### *How to cut down sugar in your child's diet*

Sugar is the primary cause of tooth decay in children. Often fruit juices aimed at children have more sugar than a can of Coke. We know that sugar is enemy number one in terms of teeth, but children love a sugary snack or drink. A glass of milk or fresh water is always better for their teeth than a fizzy drink or high-sugar fruit juice, but you can also help reduce the effect of a sugary drink by encouraging your child to use a straw.

These tips will help you reduce the amount of sugar in your child's diet and prevent tooth decay:

- Avoid sugar-sweetened drinks – the best drinks for young children are their usual milk and water.
- It's OK to use bottles for expressed breast milk, formula milk, or cooled boiled water. Using bottles for juices or sugary drinks can increase tooth decay.
- From 6 months old, you can offer babies drinks in a non-valved free-flowing cup.
- When your baby starts eating solid foods, encourage them to eat savoury food and drinks with no sugar. Check if there's sugar in pre-prepared baby foods (including the savoury ones), rusks and baby drinks. Read more about food labels at 'Food labels - NHS ([www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk))'
- If you choose to give your child sweet foods or fruit juice, only give them at mealtimes. Remember to dilute 1 part juice to 10 parts water. Your child should have no more than 1 drink of fruit juice (150ml) in any 1 day as part of their **5 A Day**.
- Don't give your child biscuits or sweets – ask family and friends to do the same. Offer things like hair slides, crayons, colouring books and bubbles instead. They may be more expensive than sweets, but they last longer.
- At bedtime or during the night, only give your child breast milk, formula or cooled boiled water.
- If your child needs medicine, ask your pharmacist or GP if there's a sugar-free option.
- Check your whole family's sugar intake. Sucrose, glucose, dextrose, maltose, fructose and hydrolysed starch are all sugars. Invert sugar or syrup, honey, raw sugar, brown sugar, cane sugar, muscovado sugar and concentrated fruit juices are also sugars.

### *Should I give my baby a dummy?*

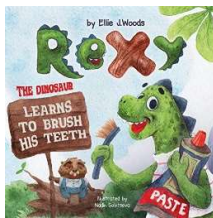
It's fine to give your baby a dummy, although avoid using them after 12 months of age. Using dummies after this can encourage an open bite, which is when teeth move to make space for the dummy. They may also affect your child's speech development.

Discourage your child from talking or making sounds with a dummy or their thumb in their mouth, and do not dip dummies in anything sweet, such as sugar or jam.

Information accessed from: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/baby/babys-development/teething/looking-after-your-babys-teeth/>

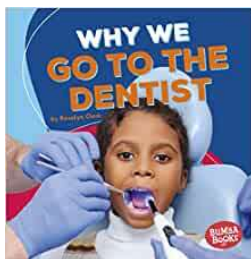
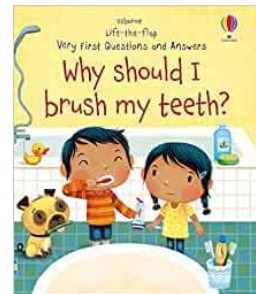
Information on sugar swaps [www.nhs.uk/change4life](http://www.nhs.uk/change4life)

### *Books for children on looking after their teeth:*



Rexy the Dinosaur Learns to Brush his Teeth by Ellie J Woods

Why Should I Brush My Teeth? (Very First Lift-the-Flap Questions and Answers) by Katie Daynes and Marta Alvarez Miguens



Why We Go to the Dentist by Rosalyn Clark

Brush, Brush, Brush! by Alicia Padron

