

## **Advice For Children**

Good oral health habits started early in life are the key to maintaining healthy teeth for life. Children should be encouraged to take care of their teeth from an early age so that a good oral health routine is instilled in them.

### **Teething**

This may be painful and can continue over several months. It is recognisable by irritability, dribbling, frantic chewing and red cheeks. Teething gels or sugar-free paracetamol may relieve more severe pain. A number of gels and other preparations may help, as may teething rings, which can be cooled in the fridge. If the problem continues, and is causing distress, ask your dentist's advice.

### **Toothbrushing**

Toothbrushing should begin as soon as the first teeth start to appear, using a baby toothbrush. Cuddle the baby on your lap with his back against you, holding the chin firmly so you are in control, preferably in front of a mirror, so the baby can see what is happening too. Let the baby play with the toothbrush so that the experience becomes an enjoyable game.

From around the age of 2, children will want to brush their own teeth, but they will need adult help and supervision until the age of 7. Make brushing fun and reward (but not with sweets) when the child does well.

Teeth should be brushed thoroughly twice a day, ideally morning AND evening, working round the mouth methodically and cleaning all surfaces. Your dentist or hygienist will show the child the correct technique. Use a small pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste.

Remind older children about brushing twice a day, and check that they have done it properly. After brushing, spit out; do not rinse.

### **Choice Of Brush**

Children's brushes are widely available, often featuring fun and fashionable characters to encourage use. Many have stout, moulded handles to suit little hands, small heads and end rounded filaments.

They should be changed at least twice every 3 months or when the filaments get tatty – often through chewing. Don't share brushes between children.

### **Fluoride**

Fluoride is important to strengthen teeth and prevent decay. Use a fluoride toothpaste for your child. Your dentist can advise whether an adult or baby paste is most suitable.



## **Pit and Fissure Sealants**

These are a plastic coating that the dentist or hygienist can paint over the biting surface of the tooth, sealing it off and preventing decay. If your child is at high risk from caries, your dentist may recommend this treatment.

## **Diet**

Children naturally enjoy sweet taste. Try to encourage them to snack on healthy items such as yoghurt or fruit, and keep their sugar intake down by restricting sweets and cakes to mealtimes. Sweets such as chocolate do less harm than hard sweets, as they dissolve quicker in the mouth, so exposing the teeth to sugar for a shorter time. Beware 'hidden sugars', such as glucose, dextrose, fructose, etc in prepared foods.

Avoid fizzy drinks and too many acidic fruit juices that risk eroding the enamel. Milk and water are the safest drinks for children's teeth and are the only drinks that should be served in a feeding bottle. Never leave a child with a sweet drink in a bottle as a comforter and do not dip dummies into sweet substances.

## **Dental Visits**

Regular dental check-ups for children are particularly important to spot any developing problems, particularly orthodontics. As for adults, the dentist can also make sure that the teeth are in good condition and advise on issues such as toothbrushing.