

# CHILDREN'S TEETH



## When to visit a dental practice for the first time

As soon as your child gets their first teeth and certainly by their first birthday, take them to the dentist so they become familiar with the experience. Their first visit might be to accompany you or someone else in the family for a routine appointment. If you are worried about going to the dentist, you might also like to ask your partner or a grandparent to attend. It is important that you are positive about your forthcoming visit so that your child does not become unduly anxious.



Don't worry if your child doesn't want to open their mouth on the first visit to the dentist. The important thing is they get used to being in a dental practice while you have time to ask the dental team for advice on caring for your child's teeth. Your child should see a dentist regularly. Until their 18th birthday, the time between appointments should never be more than 12 months.

## When to start cleaning a baby's teeth

As soon as your child's teeth start to come through, introduce them to the idea of cleaning. Use a small soft toothbrush to clean the teeth so your child gets used to it. Brush regularly as part of your child's morning and night-time routine, using a flat smear of fluoride toothpaste (with at least 1000ppm fluoride) until they are 3 years of age. After this time, you can use a small pea-sized amount. As your child gets older you can encourage them to do their own brushing but you should continue to supervise until they are 7 years of age. It is advisable to keep toothpaste out of the reach of young children. A manual toothbrush used correctly is as effective as an electric brush. The last thing to touch a child's teeth before they go to bed should be a fluoride toothpaste.

## Early food and drink

The early weeks of your baby's life are straightforward with milk being the sole food, either from breast or bottle. Breast milk or infant formula milk meet all your babies nutritional needs for the first 6 months of their life. Around the age of 6 months you can encourage your child to drink from a free-flowing or open top cup, so that bottle use does not continue past their first birthday.

## Food and drink for little toddlers

Try and keep drinks and food to mealtimes and avoid giving your child any food or drink with the exception of water in the hour before bed. Aim to limit food and drink that contains sugar including those which are said to be healthy, such as dried fruit, which is sticky and clings to teeth and can be damaging to teeth if frequently consumed between meals. Water should be made regularly available to your child from around the age of 6 months. Your child is less likely to get decay if their teeth are given a rest from food and drinks other than water between meal times.



British Society of  
Paediatric Dentistry

University Hospitals Bristol **NHS**

NHS Foundation Trust

Primary Care Dental Service

Respecting everyone  
Embracing change  
Recognising success  
Working together  
**Our hospitals.**

# CHILDREN'S TEETH

## What not to do

Never leave your baby or toddler with a feeding bottle or trainer cup in their mouth for long periods of time, such as when they go to bed, and never dip a bottle or pacifier in sweet or fruit-based drinks. Please do not put drinks other than milk in your baby's bottle or add anything to milk such as sugar or honey as this can be very damaging to your child's teeth. It's also recommended that parents shouldn't "clean" their babies' dummies or bottles by putting them in their own mouths. You could pass on bacteria to your child which would otherwise not be present in their mouths.



## Why is fluoride recommended?

Over time, we have become increasingly aware of the important role of fluoride in strengthening tooth enamel. Fluoride occurs naturally in some water supplies, but in other parts of the country it is added to prevent dental decay. Research has shown that there is substantially less dental decay in children's teeth in areas where the drinking water is fluoridated.

Fluoride can also be found in toothpaste and other oral health products. When brushing with a fluoride toothpaste, please do not rinse your child's mouth after brushing as you will wash away the fluoride and lose its protective effect. "Spit - don't rinse" is the mantra! Fluoride varnish is an effective way to protect your child's teeth and should also be discussed with your dental team.

Toothpastes containing no less than 1000ppm (parts per million) fluoride are recommended as soon as the first teeth come through. Once your child has reached their 3rd birthday toothpastes of between 1000ppm and 1500ppm can be used.

If you are in any doubt about which toothpaste is best for your child, ask your dentist.

## Dummies & thumb-sucking

Sucking is a natural reflex in a young child and a dummy may help soothe a restless child. Some children automatically suck their thumb or finger for comfort. This is entirely natural.

However, you should never give your child a dummy which has a drink or something sweet in it and we recommend that in the long-term, as adult teeth come through, the dummy and thumb-sucking are discouraged. Talk to your dental team if you need some advice on managing this.

