

Healthy teeth begin at birth

A guide for parents of babies, toddlers and infants

In 2015, referring to child health, a report by the Royal College of Surgeons stated “Almost a third of five-year-olds are suffering from tooth decay, there are significant regional inequalities, and it is the most common single reason why five- to nine-year-olds are admitted to hospital. In some cases children are admitted for multiple tooth extractions under general anaesthetic, despite tooth decay being almost entirely preventable.”

No child is ever born with tooth decay, so the best time to start a preventive regime is early on, before problems develop.

Children need their teeth for smiling, talking and eating food. Mums, dads and other caregivers must help to take care of their children's teeth.



Things that you can do at home:

- Dummy or no dummy? While this does not affect decay, prolonged thumb/finger sucking or using a dummy can lead to orthodontic issues in the future. Unlike the dummy, the thumb cannot ultimately be taken away at an appropriate time and the position of your child's teeth can be significantly affected.
- Before your baby has teeth, wipe the gums gently with a clean wet cloth after each feeding. Xylitol wipes are available (eg from brush-baby.co.uk) which may be of benefit in reducing bacteria. **Don't put your baby to bed at naptime or at night with a bottle or sipping cup, unless it has only water in it. Never coat a dummy in anything sweet.**
- Adults can chew Xylitol gum right after eating to reduce their germ count and help prevent the spread of germs to their children. It is also important that any decay that an adult may have is treated, to minimize the risk of germ transfer to your baby/toddler.
- To avoid spreading the germs that can cause cavities, don't put anything in a child's mouth if it has been in your mouth. Don't share spoons, cups, toothbrushes, etc. This is now believed to be how children acquire decay causing germs in the first place.
- Eruption of baby teeth may pass without discomfort but teething may also cause sore, red gum around where the tooth is coming through, flushed cheeks, dribbling more than usual, gnawing and chewing, loss of appetite and disturbed sleep. Give your baby something hard (preferably cold) to chew on. Teething ring is an option but a crust of bread, breadstick or a peeled carrot may work as well. Teething rings can be cooled in the fridge, but should not be frozen. A wet cold flannel may be as effective. Use analgesics as appropriate.
- As soon as the first tooth appears, start brushing your baby's teeth with fluoride toothpaste in the morning and before bedtime. Fluoride is a mineral that protects the teeth. It is now recognised that toothpastes with less than 1000ppm fluoride are ineffective at controlling decay. Official advice now states that children under three years should use a toothpaste containing **no less than 1,000 ppm** fluoride (eg Aquafresh Milk Teeth) but with only a **small smear** of paste on the brush. Get into the habit of brushing the teeth from behind, maybe while kneeling or sitting on the floor, it will feel a far more natural process for you and give you better control of the head.
- For children of 3-6 years a **pea sized** amount of the toothpaste should be used of concentration about **1350-1500ppm** (eg Aquafresh Little Teeth) twice daily, in the morning, ideally before breakfast, and right before bedtime.
- After brushing, when old enough, get your child to spit out into the basin but not rinse, as



this washes away the benefit of the fluoride.

- Never let children lick or eat toothpaste from the tube
- A child needs an adult's help in brushing their teeth until they are at least 8 years old.

What your child eats and how often they eat affects their teeth.

- Tooth decay can be thought of as the result of an infection with certain types of bacteria that use sugars in food to make acids. Over time, these acids can make a cavity in the tooth. Throughout the day a tug of war takes place in our mouth.

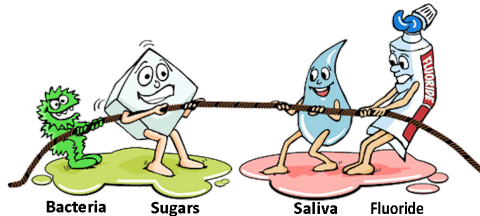


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- Fizzy drinks, sweet drinks, sweets, and chocolates can cause cavities that hurt.
- Limit how often your child has juice, sweet drinks and snacks.
- Snacks like cheese, yogurt, fruit and vegetables are better for your child's teeth than crisps, biscuits, or sugared cereal.
- When giving fruit juice or squash, try to dilute it as much as possible.
- After your child eats sweets, crisps, biscuits or juice, you should rinse their teeth with water.
- Sugars, just because they are natural eg in honey does not mean that they will not cause decay; dried fruits equally will contain lots of sugar condensed from the original fruit.
- As much as possible, try and keep sugar containing snacks and drinks to mealtimes only. The mouth is far more able to deal with this than when sugar is taken in between meals.



Things that can be done at the Practice:

- Take your baby to the dentist by their first birthday, initially just to watch you in the chair and become acclimatized. Let young children enjoy our interactive Aquabubble!
- Ask your child's dentist about putting fluoride varnish on your child's teeth. This is another great way to protect your child's teeth from cavities.
- At age 6, consider fissure sealants on the permanent molar teeth, particularly if there has been decay in the baby teeth. These are coatings that cover over the most decay susceptible area on the biting surfaces.
- You and your child should visit the dentist on a regular basis, as often as your dentist recommends.



For more advice on children's teeth, visit www.atkinsonbrignall.co.uk