

Brushing teeth

What is the correct technique for brushing, how much fluoride should the toothpaste contain – and other questions, answered by **Annette Raulstone**



Starting a regular teeth-cleaning routine from when your baby's first milk tooth breaks through is essential for good dental health.

It's vital to care for your child's milk teeth, even though they'll eventually fall out, because they play an important role in helping your child to bite and chew food and to speak clearly. It also sets the foundation for your child taking care of their teeth into adulthood.



WHEN TO BRUSH

Get into a routine of brushing your child's teeth for two to three minutes (about the length of a song) twice a day. Always do this before

bedtime and then perhaps when they get up or after breakfast. It may be difficult to clean your baby's teeth at first but they should soon become used to the routine.

TIPS FOR BRUSHING

- The NHS recommends that children under three years old should use just a smear of toothpaste. Children aged from three to six years should use a pea-sized blob.
- Help children under seven years old to brush their teeth as they are still developing the fine motor skills to do it themselves. Continue to supervise toothbrushing occasionally after this age.
- Stand behind your child to clean their teeth for sit your baby on your knee) and angle

the toothbrush to reach the gums. Use a gentle small circular motion.

- Let your child watch you clean your teeth and demonstrate proper brushing techniques.
- Encourage your child to have a go while looking in a mirror. Guide their hand so they can feel the correct movement.
- Use an egg-timer to measure how long to clean teeth for.
- Encourage your child to spit out excess toothpaste, rather than rinsing their mouth with water. Rinsing will wash away the fluoride in the toothpaste and make it less effective.
- Remind your child of the importance of looking after their teeth.



CHOOSING TOOTHPASTE

There's a wide range of toothpaste brands available. Many are marketed directly at children, but the key to choosing appropriate toothpaste is to check the packaging for how much fluoride it contains.

- Children up to the age of six years old, unless you're informed otherwise by your dentist, should use a lower-strength toothpaste with at least 1,000 parts per million (ppm) fluoride.
- Children from the age of seven should have toothpaste which contains 1,350-1,500 ppm fluoride.
- Don't presume special children's toothpaste has the correct amount of fluoride. Some don't have enough to help prevent tooth decay, so always check the packaging.

GOING FOR CHECK-UPS

Of course, an important part of oral healthcare is visiting the dentist. Remember that dental care is free for children. The dentist will look at the health of your child's teeth and gums and give advice on keeping their mouth healthy.

- You should make your child's first dental appointment when their first milk tooth appears. This will help them to get familiar with the environment, which can be daunting.
- You can sit on the chair with your child and even have your teeth checked while you're there. Make sure you're positive about the trip and make it fun, to stop your child from worrying about future visits.
- Ask your dentist about fluoride varnish or fissure

sealing. Your child should have fluoride varnish applied at least twice a year from the age of three. The dentist may also suggest this for younger children. It simply involves painting a varnish containing high levels of fluoride onto the surface of teeth to strengthen the tooth enamel and help prevent decay.

- Often it is suggested that your child should have a check-up every six months, but how frequently you visit the dentist will depend on your child's oral health. Your dentist will advise on when to book the next check-up.

FOSTER GOOD HABITS

- Along with regularly cleaning your child's teeth and visiting the dentist, you can help them avoid dental problems by:
 - limiting the amount of sweets your child eats, particularly before bedtime when saliva flows less
 - avoiding giving your child a taste for sweet drinks by only giving them water or milk – with water being the best drink at bedtime
 - if you want to give your child other drinks, avoid fizzy drinks which are very high in sugar. Be aware that even unsweetened juices and smoothies contain sugars and acids that can damage your child's teeth. Limit these to a small glass a day and only at mealtimes
 - start weaning your child off a bottle and onto a free-flow cup at six months old. Aim for them to have stopped using bottles by their first birthday – teats and spouts encourage children to suck for long periods of time, which can result in drinks staying in contact with your child's teeth for longer



The Boy Who Hated Toothbrushes by Zehra Hicks

Billy hates toothbrushes, so he never cleans his teeth. Then he discovers a Fantastic Toothsparkler

Brush, Brush, Brush! by Alicia Padron

A charming and fun book showing children how to brush their teeth properly

Tusk Trouble by Jane Clark and Cecilia Johansson

Wairus Wilbur has a sore tusk and doesn't want to go to the dentist, until Grandpa persuades him that it's a good idea

Open Wide... What's Inside? by Alex and Helen Rushworth

A tale of the sugar bugs and what they can do to your teeth

How to Brush Your Teeth with Snappy Croc by Jane Clarke and Claire Birkett

A lovable character and playful, rhyming text help children to master the routine of toothbrushing