

PATIENT INFORMATION

Keeping your teeth and mouth healthy

Top tips from the Community Dental Team

Step one - Tooth brushing

Brushing your teeth removes food debris and the bacteria that can cause decay.

For best results, choose a brush with a small/medium sized head suitable for the age group, with bristles that are of soft/ medium hardness.

Electric toothbrushes have been shown to be more effective at reducing levels of plaque. Choose one with a single oscillating head.

You should brush your teeth twice a day - once before bedtime and at one other time. For most people this is normally after breakfast. Nothing should be eaten after brushing at bedtime but if a drink is required it should only be water, although milk is also acceptable.

Disclosing tablets (available from chemists) which stain plaque can help you check your brushing technique.

If you find it hard to hold a toothbrush the Community Dental Team can suggest how to adapt the handle.

Children aged seven and under should be supervised when brushing their teeth.

Step two - Toothpaste

Toothpaste contains Fluoride which helps to strengthen teeth and protect against decay. Levels of fluoride can vary in toothpastes.

The amount can be found on the tube and packaging - a number followed by the letters 'ppm' (parts per million).

For children 0 - 3 years

1,000ppm as a minimum. Use only a smear of toothpaste by gently scraping the brush head across the top of the toothpaste tube, rather than squeezing the toothpaste down onto the brush head.

For children 3 - 6 years

1,350-1500ppm. Use a pea size amount of toothpaste on the brush.

Age 6 and over

Over the age of six years and for adults a pea size is still sufficient.

All ages should spit toothpaste out. Do not rinse or use a mouthwash straight after brushing as this removes the protective layer of fluoride from the teeth.

Step three - Reduce sugar intake

It is the **frequency** of sugar consumption that increases the risk of developing cavities which may lead to toothache.

Keep foods and drinks containing sugar to mealtimes only; teeth will then be 'under attack' just three times a day.

Sugars to avoid in snack foods are: Sugar, Sucrose, Glucose, Maltose, Dextrose, Fructose, Hydrolysed starch, Corn syrup, Golden syrup, Brown sugar, Honey, Treacle and Concentrated Fruit juice

For snacks choose 'safe for teeth' options such as cheese, a piece of fruit, sugar free yoghurts, toast, crumpets or bread sticks. Check the ingredients as some manufacturers may add sugar to their products

As drinks often contain sugar, the only safe drinks for teeth between meals are milk and water. For adults, tea and coffee made with artificial sweeteners are acceptable.

Chew sugar free gum, preferably containing Xylitol after meals for 20 minutes. (Not suitable for young / unsupervised children).

Step four - Erosion

This happens when consuming acidic foods (e.g. oranges, grapefruits) and drinks (e.g. cola, lemonade and fruit juices, even those advertised as sugar free) damages the teeth. As a result teeth often become sensitive to hot and cold. Try to reduce the consumption of acidic foods and drinks to prevent erosion.

Drinking through a straw reduces contact with the teeth, but avoid swishing or holding the liquid in the mouth.

Stop using bottles for infant drinks by 12 months of age. Introduce a 'free flow' (non-valve) cup at six months of age.

Top Tips to help keep your mouth healthy

- Do attend for dental checks as often as your dentist advises
- If you wear full mouth dentures, you still need to get your mouth checked by a dentist annually.
- Get advice from a dentist for any mouth ulcer which does not heal within three weeks.
- Ask for sugar free medicines whenever possible
- Wear a mouth guard when playing contact sports.
- Quit smoking - please ask for more details if you would like to stop smoking or contact the Torbay Stop Smoking Service on 0300 456 1006

To find an **NHS dentist** please call the dental helpline on: 03330 063 300

For **emergency dental advice** during working hours please call 01803 217777.

The **out of hours emergency dental service** can be contacted on 03330 063 300

For further assistance or to receive this information in a different format, please contact the department which created this leaflet.