



UNION QUAY
DENTAL

Small teeth, smart habits: A parent's guide to healthy teeth





Did you know?

The most common reason for children needing a general anaesthetic in the UK is for tooth extraction due to tooth decay.

Over 19,000 children aged 5-9 in England were admitted to hospital for tooth extractions in 2023/24. That's 50% higher than the number admitted due to tonsillitis.

Most of us know that sugary foods aren't good for our teeth, but how does that bag of pick n mix really end up with a trip to the emergency dentist?

What causes tooth decay?

Bacteria: which make a sticky film on the teeth called plaque. They feed on



Sugar: from sugary food and drinks, producing



Acid: Which dissolves the outer layer of enamel on the teeth and makes holes (cavities).

And then...



As the tooth decay gets worse, it can progress into the soft inner layers of the tooth and reach the nerves, which can cause infections and become very painful, leading to the tooth needing to be removed. Ouch!



Don't panic...



There are simple steps you can take to keep your children's teeth and gums healthy. We've sorted through the big government guidance document to bring you the essentials.

- The right tooth brushing techniques
 - Reducing sugar
- How your dentist can help



Brushing guide for kids



Age 0-3	Age 3-6	Age 6-18
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Start brushing your baby's teeth as soon as they erupt• Brush twice a day• Brush last thing at night (or before bedtime) and on one other occasion• Use a toothpaste containing at least 1,000ppm fluoride• Use only a smear of toothpaste 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teeth should be brushed by a parent or carer. As the child gets older, a parent or carer should assist them to brush their own teeth.• Brush at least twice a day, on all tooth surfaces.• Brush last thing at night (or before bedtime) and on at least one other occasion.• Use a toothpaste containing at least 1,000ppm fluoride• Use a pea-sized amount of the toothpaste.• Spit out after brushing rather than rinsing, to avoid diluting the fluoride concentration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Brush teeth at least twice daily (with assistance from parent or carer if required) on all tooth surfaces.• Brush last thing at night (or before bedtime) and on at least one other occasion• Use toothpaste containing 1,350 to 1,500ppm fluoride• Spit out after brushing rather than rinsing with water, to avoid diluting the fluoride concentration 

At all ages...

- Some evidence suggests **electric toothbrushes** are more effective, but manual toothbrushes are still very effective at removing plaque when used properly.
- Use **sugar-free** versions of **medicines** wherever possible.
- **Fluoride** helps to prevent, control and stop tooth decay from developing further. For children with active tooth decay, your dentist may prescribe applying a fluoride varnish twice a year, or using a higher fluoride toothpaste suitable for their age.

Fact: 81% of 15 year olds in the UK brush their teeth twice a day



The low-down on sugar

Research has shown that in the UK we eat too many **'free sugars'**. These include all sugars added to foods and drinks by the manufacturer, cook or consumer, as well as sugars naturally present in **honey, syrups, smoothies** and **fruit juices**.

It might surprise you that the sugars naturally present in **dairy-alternative drinks** such as soya, rice, oat and nut-based drinks are also classed as 'free sugars'.

It does not include sugars found naturally in whole fresh fruit and vegetables, or those naturally present in milk and milk products.

Fact: High sugar intake is the biggest cause of tooth decay in children in the UK.



The main sources of free sugars consumed by children are:

- Soft drinks and fruit drinks
- Cereal and cereal products
- Sugar, preserves and confectionery



Even as dentists, we know how hard it is to resist sweet treats. **Reducing sugar is key**, but if your little ones do love to eat it, **timing is everything!**

- **Don't eat sweets between meals.** All food and drinks with sugar should ideally be eaten at mealtimes, when there is more saliva in the mouth to wash away sugar and to neutralise acids.
- Avoid food and drinks containing sugar at **bedtime**, because saliva flow(which is important for protecting teeth) drops overnight.



Age	Recommended amount of sugar per day
4- 6 years	No more than 19 grams of sugar, equivalent to approximately 5 cubes
7-10 years	No more than 24 grams of sugar, equivalent to approximately 6 cubes
11 years +	No more than 30 grams of sugar, equivalent to approximately 7 cubes
Guidance for babies	<p>Breastfeeding is linked to lower tooth decay risk. For infants being bottle-fed: only give infant formula or breast milk - never add sugar, honey, or other sugary substances.</p> <p>From around 6 months, introduce a variety of solid foods; do not add sugar to foods or drinks.</p> <p>From 6 months, encourage drinking from a free-flow cup and discourage bottle feeding after age 1.</p>



Practical tips:

- Only give sweet foods and dried fruit at mealtimes.
- Encourage water or milk instead of sugary drinks.
- Ask for sugar-free medicines for children when available.
- Try to avoid juice outside meals, especially as a “between-meal” drink.



How your dentist can help

Regular check-ups help your child's dentist spot signs of tooth decay early and deal with them before they progress.

Your dentist can advise on the best methods of brushing and any specific queries you may have about your child's teeth.

Your dentist may advise a fluoride varnish to protect your child's teeth if they are at a higher risk of developing tooth decay.





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This document was developed using the UK government guidance 'Delivering better oral health: an evidence-based toolkit for prevention'. You can view the whole document [here](#).

Keep your family's teeth healthy with regular visits to the dentist.

Book your appointment today via our [website](#), email reception@unionquaydental.co.uk or speak to reception on 0191 2596506

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