

Healthy Habits for Healthy Kids

A Parent's Guide to
Children's Oral Health



Dental Insurance from the Dental Experts



To learn new things, your child needs to feel healthy and strong. Cavities or tooth decay in children can be painful and uncomfortable, which can stop them from doing their best when learning at home or at school. Preventing tooth decay will help your child's progress and promote good overall health.

Tooth Tips for Children 0-7 years



0-6 months

- Clean mouth with warm water and piece of gauze (no teeth present)



6 months to 2 years

- Clean teeth and gums with soft children's brush and warm water.
- Bring your child to the dentist before their 1st birthday and ask about when to introduce fluoride toothpaste. (1st tooth comes at 6 months)



2 to 7 years

- Use a small pea size amount or a smear of normal adult fluoride toothpaste.
- Assist your child with brushing in the morning and at night time.
- Spit out but do not rinse out after brushing and do not swallow toothpaste.
- Bring your child to the dentist once a year.



Save the Day

How you care for your child's teeth will affect their ability to learn and to grow up healthy. By encouraging good oral health habits in your family, you will help keep your child's teeth healthy and strong and give them a smile to treasure for a lifetime.

This booklet tells you how.



Healthy Habits for Healthy Kids



What Causes Tooth Decay and Cavities?

A sticky film of bacteria, called dental plaque biofilm, is constantly forming on the teeth and especially in the area where the teeth and gum meet and also on the biting surface of the teeth. When your child eats or drinks foods containing sugars or other carbohydrate, the dental plaque biofilm converts the sugars into acid. Normally the acid is neutralized by saliva but when sugary foods are eaten too frequently the saliva is not able to cope and the acid causes the enamel (outer hard white surface of tooth) to soften. If this continues over a long period of time the dental plaque biofilm will penetrate through the enamel tubules (pores) and gradually cause softening inside the tooth. Eventually a hole or dental cavity will form. Dental cavities may develop if your child consumes sugary foods and drinks more than four times a day. Normally, it is a gradual process, but it can be stopped or reversed by changes to the diet and by using fluoride.

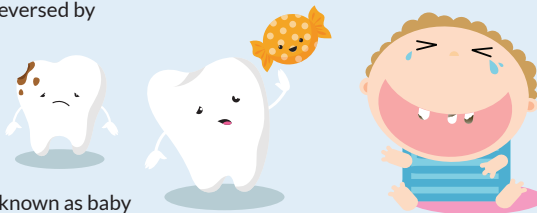
What is Tooth Erosion and What Causes it?

Tooth erosion is the softening and wearing away of tooth surface enamel caused by the continual presence in the mouth of acidic food and drinks, such as fizzy drinks and fruit juices. This can occur even when there is good oral hygiene. The continual presence of acid softens the enamel which gradually dissolves and gets brushed away. Tooth erosion can be prevented by reducing the frequency of eating or drinking acidic foods or drinks and by only using a soft brush with a small head for cleaning. For infants fruit juice should be diluted to five parts of water to one part of juice.

Early Childhood Caries (ECC Dental Decay)

Early Childhood Caries (ECC), sometimes known as baby bottle tooth decay, refers to severe, often rapidly spreading, decay in the teeth of infants or young children. Very often it starts with transmission of bacteria called strep mutans from another family member who has dental decay. Dental decay can occur almost as soon as the first baby teeth appear. It can start very quickly when sweetened liquids, including milk, milk formula and fruit juices are given and are left clinging to an infant's teeth for long periods. The dental plaque biofilm on the teeth can continually produce acid and this results in dental decay spreading very quickly through the teeth. Early signs of ECC can be detected by the appearance of white spots developing on the teeth.

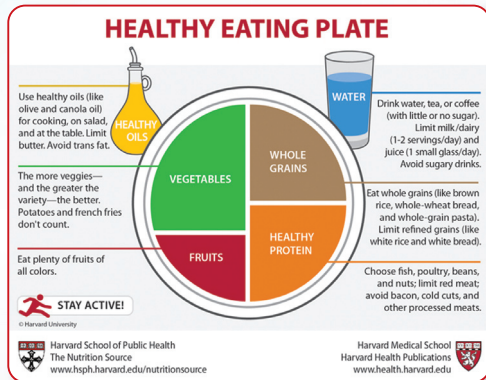
A bottle given at night-time should only contain boiled cooled water. Remember a child should be fed and put to bed, but not put to bed and fed. Encourage drinking from a plastic cup as soon as possible.



Choosing Healthy Foods at Home and at School



Encouraging your child to eat a healthy diet will help them to stay alert and responsive in school and will also help to protect their teeth. Choosing healthy foods and establishing good eating habits are an important part of your child's oral health and general health.



- ✓ For meals at home, serve your child's foods from the main food groups.
- ✓ Eat plenty of fruit of all colours and plenty of vegetables and the greater the variety the better.
- ✓ Fish, poultry, beans and nuts are examples of healthy protein.
- ✓ Eat whole grains like brown rice, whole wheat bread and whole grain pasta.
- ✓ Eat dairy products in moderation.
- ✓ Encourage your child to drink lots of water.
- ✓ Encourage your child to make healthy snack choices and ask your child's school to encourage healthy eating at break time.
- ✓ Avoid sweets, biscuits and cakes, which cause tooth decay, and may contribute to other health problems.
- ✓ Limit sweetened drinks and acidic fruit juices which are harmful to teeth.
- ✓ Limit sugary snacks to one or two a day and preferably at meal times.





Choosing the Right Toothbrush



Why not make tooth brushing time a fun time. There are so many brands of toothbrush available in many different colours, shapes and sizes; some even have musical timers to ensure correct length of brushing time.

Here are some tips to help you make the right choice:



Choose a child size toothbrush with soft, round-tipped, nylon bristles. Stiff or sharp bristles can injure gums and wear down tooth enamel.



Bring your child with you and help them select their own tooth-brush.



Choose a size and a shape that is comfortable and lets your child reach every surface of every tooth. A small compact head is best.



A brightly coloured 'fun' toothbrush may encourage your child to brush.



Replace your child's toothbrush when the bristles look bent or worn, usually every two to three months or more frequently if your child wears the bristles more quickly.



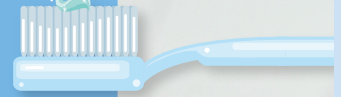
Electric toothbrushes are proven to be at least as effective or more effective when used for cleaning children's teeth. Ask your dental professional for advice about choosing the correct one.









Be Toothpaste Savvy



Toothpaste which contains fluoride is an important tool in fighting tooth decay, but do you know how much (if any) to use? It depends on the age of your child.



-  Firstly use an adult fluoride toothpaste containing 1450 parts per million.
-  For children less than 2 years start cleaning with a piece of gauze or a soft brush with water.
-  Bring your child to the dentist before their first birthday and ask about using fluoride toothpaste.
-  At 2 years of age, supervise your child using a small pea size amount or smear of adult fluoride toothpaste containing fluoride at 1450 parts per million (ppm).
-  Teach your child to spit out but not rinse out after brushing with fluoride toothpaste.
-  Do not allow your child to suck toothpaste and supervise brushing at all times.

Be a Role Model









As a parent, you are the most important role model for your child. Help your child develop proper brushing techniques by setting a good example with your own oral health.





Brush the Smart Way



- Techniques for You and Your Child

-  Brush at least twice a day with a small pea size amount or smear of adult fluoride toothpaste.
 -  Use a soft nylon bristle brush with a small compact head.
 -  Place the brush at a 45 degree angle to the tooth and use a gentle scrubbing technique.
 -  Brush the outer, the inner, and the biting surfaces of each tooth, including the part close to the gum line.
 -  Use the front tip of the brush for the inner surface of the front teeth.
 -  Apply light pressure while brushing. Tooth enamel can be worn down by vigorous scrubbing.
 -  Encourage your child to brush for at least 2 minutes each time they clean their teeth.
 -  Children under 7 will need help from an adult when cleaning their teeth.
- For babies, wipe gums with a soft cloth or gauze from the pharmacy and water in areas where the teeth have not yet appeared.

- Interdental Cleaning for Children

-  Cleaning in between the teeth may be advised by a dental professional for some children depending on their level of disease risk.
 -  For very young children, it is recommended that a parent or guardian perform this task after learning the technique from a dental professional.
- For children over 12, it is recommended that they use interdental brushes or if the spaces between their teeth are not large enough, dental floss is a useful alternative.



...a bright smile





Visiting the Dentist

- Part of a Healthy Routine



Put a reminder in your calendar to arrange your child's dental check up at least once a year. Your dentist can advise you and your family about good oral health practices so you can prevent problems before they arise.



Bring your child to the dentist not later than their first birthday and ask about when you should introduce fluoride toothpaste.



Ask your dentist if your child would benefit from dental sealants. These are plastic coatings that are painted on back molar teeth to prevent dental decay.



Your child should visit the dentist once a year or as often as the dentist recommends.



Be sure to alert your dentist to any changes you notice in your child's mouth.



If your child is neurodiverse or has a significant medical history, you may wish to have a consultation with a pediatric dentist. A pediatric dentist is specially trained to treat very young children including those with a challenging medical or behavioral history. You will be taught how to look after your child's oral health in a way that is adapted to their specific needs.





Dental Emergencies

Do You Know What to Do?

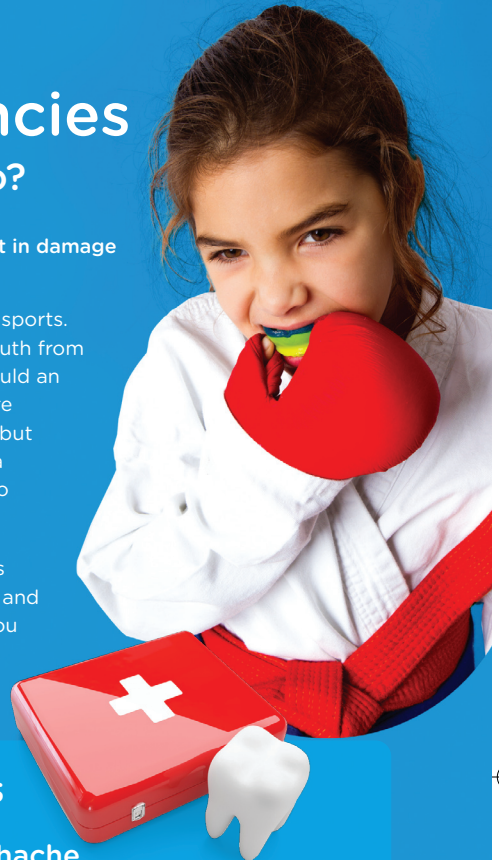
Knocks and Tumbles are part of childhood and can result in damage to teeth



Ensure your child wears a mouth guard while playing sports. A mouth guard can protect your child's teeth and mouth from injury and may also reduce the risk of concussion should an accident occur. We recommend mouth guards that are custom made by your dentist because they fit better but mouthguards bought over the counter and fitted by a parent or guardian to a manufacturer's instructions do provide a significant level of protection.



If a dental emergency occurs, see a dentist as soon as possible. Have your dentist's day time phone number and after-hours emergency number readily available so you can contact them right away.



Types of Dental Emergencies

Displaced Teeth

If a tooth is slightly pushed in or out, use light finger pressure to move the tooth back to its normal position. Do not force the tooth. Use a moist cloth or piece of gauze to hold the tooth in place. See a dentist within 30 minutes.

Broken or Chipped Teeth

See a dentist immediately. Try to find the broken or chipped portion of the tooth and take it with you. Even if that part of the tooth cannot be bonded back to the rest of the tooth, the dentist may be able to use the piece to recreate the appearance of the original tooth.



Toothache

Rinse your child's mouth with warm water to clean it. Use floss to remove any food that may be trapped between teeth. You may give your child a painkiller, such as a pediatric sugar free version of paracetamol, for the pain but you must visit your dentist immediately to find out the cause of the toothache.

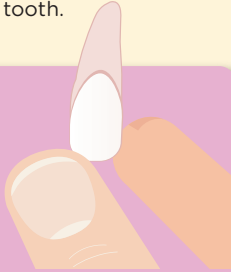
Injuries to Soft Tissues


These include tears, cuts or punctures to the cheeks, lips or tongue. Clean the wound immediately with warm water, apply pressure with a cloth or gauze and then go to a hospital or emergency centre for treatment. If there is a cut to the tongue, pull the tongue forward and apply pressure to the area with a clean cloth or with gauze to stop the bleeding. Bleeding from the mouth can initially be dramatic but there is no need to panic because it usually stops quickly in response to the first aid measures as described.


Knocked Out Tooth

Take your child to the dentist immediately. If the dentist is able to replant a knocked out tooth within 30 minutes, or even up to 1 hour, it may be possible to save the tooth.

1.




 Find and pick up the tooth by the enamel (white top portion of the tooth to prevent damage to the root.)

 Handle the tooth as little as possible and do not touch the root.


2.




 If the tooth is dirty, gently rinse it with running water, milk or special saline solution for ten seconds.


3.





 If possible, gently replace the rinsed tooth in the socket using the shape and size of the teeth on either side as a guide and hold it in place with your fingers.


 Ask your child to gently bite down on it with a soft cloth or handkerchief acting as a cushion between the teeth.

4.

 If you cannot replace the tooth in the socket, keep it moist in a container of milk, or in a special saline solution found in most first aid boxes.

 Do not wrap it in tissue or cloth as this will damage the living membrane surrounding the root

 Transport the tooth to your dentist in a glass of milk, or special saline solution or, in the case of an older child, in the child's mouth (next to the cheek).

 For 'baby teeth, do not try to replace the tooth in the socket. This could damage the formation of the permanent tooth bud. Seek advice from your dentist as soon as possible.





Quiz



1. What is the name of the sticky film of bacteria that forms on the teeth and causes tooth decay?

- A) Dental plaque biofilm
- B) Dental floss
- C) Dental enamel
- D) Dental cement

2. What is the recommended amount of fluoride toothpaste for children aged 2 to 7 years?

- A) A grain of rice
- B) A smear or pea size
- C) A 5cent coin size
- D) A €1 euro size

3. What is the main cause of tooth erosion, which is the softening and wearing away of tooth surface enamel?

- A) Acidic food and drinks
- B) Hard food and drinks
- C) Hot food and drinks
- D) Cold food and drinks

4. What kind of bristles should you choose for your child's toothbrush?

- A) Soft, round-tipped, nylon bristles
- B) Hard, pointed, metal bristles
- C) Medium, flat-tipped, plastic bristles
- D) Any kind of bristles

5. How often should you replace your child's toothbrush?

- A) Every week
- B) Every month
- C) Every two to three months
- D) Every year

6. How can you make tooth-brushing time more fun for your child?

- A) Let them choose their own toothbrush
- B) Brush your teeth together with them
- C) Reward them with stickers or praise
- D) All of the above

7. What should you do if a tooth is slightly pushed in or out?

- A) Ignore it and hope it will go back to normal
- B) Use light finger pressure to move the tooth back to its normal position
- C) Pull the tooth out and put it in milk
- D) Bite on a hard object to push the tooth back in place

8. What should you do if your tooth is broken or chipped?

- A) Bring the broken or chipped portion of the tooth to the dentist
- B) Bring a picture of the tooth before it was damaged
- C) See a dentist immediately
- D) All of the above

9. What should you use to clean your child's mouth if they have a toothache?

- A) Warm water
- B) Cold water
- C) Mouthwash
- D) Soda

10. When should you bring your child to the dentist for the first time?

- A) Before their first birthday
- B) After their first birthday
- C) After their first tooth comes in
- D) After their first tooth falls out

11. What are the benefits of dental sealants?

- A) They fill in the pits and fissures of the teeth and make them easier to clean
- B) They protect the teeth from acid and bacteria that cause cavities
- C) They reduce the need for fillings and other dental treatments in the future
- D) All of the above



Answers: 1A 2B 3A 4A 5C 6D 7B 8D 9A 10A 11D



Healthy Smiles Checklist

By teaching your child how to look after their teeth and by setting a good example with your own oral health, you can help your child develop and maintain a healthy attitude to oral health that will serve a lifetime.

✓ Encourage healthy food choices and limit sugary snacks

✓ Make sure your child drinks plenty of water and avoids sweetened or fizzy acidic drinks.

✓ Avoiding sugary snacks and fizzy acidic drinks will help prevent dental decay and dental erosion

✓ Bring infant child to dentist before 1st birthday and ask about when to introduce fluoride toothpaste.

✓ Supervise your child brushing at least twice a day with a small pea size amount or smear of adult fluoride toothpaste after their 2nd birthday.

✓ Choose a toothbrush with a small head, soft nylon bristles and show your child how to use it.

✓ Brush teeth and gums for at least two minutes to remove dental plaque biofilm effectively.

✓ An electric toothbrush is at least as effective as an ordinary toothbrush.

✓ Replace your child's toothbrush every two to three months or more often as

✓ needed.

✓ Ask your dental professional about when to introduce cleaning in between the teeth with interdental brushes and dental floss.

✓ Have your child's teeth checked by the dentist once a year, or as often as the dentist recommends, and remember to find out about school dental screenings for your child.



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Get in touch

T: 094 937 8608

E: query@decaredental.ie

W: www.decare.ie

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