



KEEPING YOUR CHILD'S TEETH HEALTHY

What are dental caries?

Dental caries (tooth decay) is a major oral health problem in most countries, affecting **60–90%** of schoolchildren and the vast majority of adults. This affection can be highly reduced by **tooth brushing daily**.

How do we actually get it?

Dental caries is caused by the action of **acids** on the enamel surface. The acid is produced when sugars in foods or drinks react with **bacteria** which are naturally present in the mouth and form the dental biofilm (plaque) on the tooth surface. The acid produced leads to a loss of calcium and phosphate from the enamel; this process is called demineralization and occurs each time we eat or drink especially sugars.

What can we do about it?

Fluoride delivered directly (or topically) to the tooth surfaces by toothpastes and rinses help to maintain fluoride levels in the mouth.

Fluoride **toothpastes** are an important source of additional fluoride and should be used twice a day to help maintain a constant level of fluoride in the mouth.

Daily fluoride **mouthrinses** are particularly useful for people who are prone to high levels of decay and also for people wearing orthodontic braces.

Fluoride varnishes and gels are alternative forms of topical fluorides that require application by a dentist or dental hygienist.

What is fluoride and how does it work?

Fluoride is a substance that **naturally** occurs in some water sources and also in most toothpastes.

In addition to slowing down the process of demineralization fluoride also helps to “heal” dental surfaces (remineralization).

How should your child use it?

You should start brushing your child's teeth as soon as they start erupting (around **6 months** age).
Then, from 2 until 7 years old:

- Use a small **peasized** amount of fluoride toothpaste 1,000–1,500 ppm.
- Supervise brushing twice a day, in the morning and at night just before bedtime.
- A child under seven years needs help from an adult when brushing teeth.
- A child should never eat or swallow toothpaste.
- Clean the teeth thoroughly twice every day with fluoride toothpaste.

Is there anything else that could help?

Reduce Frequent Consumption of Sugars

There is overwhelming evidence that frequent consumption of sugars is associated with caries. Studies have shown that sugar consumption remains a moderate risk factor for caries even when populations have adequate exposure to fluoride. Foods and drinks containing “free sugars” (i.e., sugars which have been added to food plus sugars naturally present in honey, fruit juices and syrup) should be recognised and the frequency of their intake – especially between meals – reduced.

Pit and Fissure Sealants

Among children, tooth decay occurs most commonly on the pit and fissure surfaces of back teeth. Pit and fissure sealants are a safe and effective way to prevent dental caries on these vulnerable surfaces. Sealants must be applied by a dental professional, i.e., a dentist or dental hygienist.

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