



Top Tips for Healthy Teeth

It is important to keep baby teeth healthy. Baby teeth allow our little ones to enjoy their food and they pave the way for the developing adult teeth which start to come through from the age of about 6 to 8 years old. If baby teeth develop tooth decay, they are at risk of causing pain and infection, and painful teeth can impact a child's ability to enjoy food, sleep well and impact their overall health.

Luckily, it's quite simple to keep your child's smile healthy by following my top tips below:

Brush Teeth Twice a Day

Start brushing as soon as the baby teeth come through. Brush twice a day, once before bedtime and at another time of the day. Establishing toothbrushing as part of their daily routine, early means that children are used to healthy habits from a young age.

The First Dental Visit

The British Society of Paediatric Dentistry (BSPD) recommends a child should be taken to the dentist for the first time as their first tooth comes through, or by the age of one (whichever is earliest). It hasn't always been easy to see a dentist in recent years, so do not worry if you've not managed your child's first check up yet. It's never too late to start taking them.



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Use a Fluoride Toothpaste.

Fluoride is the super ingredient in toothpaste which strengthens tooth enamel, making it more resistant to tooth decay. Toddlers should have a grain of rice sized smear containing **no less** than 1000ppm fluoride (the level of fluoride should always be in the ingredients on the tube or packaging). After the age of 3, a pea-sized amount is perfect. Also don't worry if your child doesn't like minty toothpastes. There are now a number of milder or flavour-free toothpastes on the market. Just make sure to check the fluoride amount is the right amount for your child. If you're unsure, just ask your local dentist.

Spit, Don't Rinse

After brushing, do not rinse your child's mouth as you will wash away the fluoride, removing the protective layer. Keeping a little bit of toothpaste on the teeth will allow it to continue to work long after you've stopped brushing. Always encourage children to spit the toothpaste and reduce the amount they swallow.

Help With Brushing

Help your child brush their teeth and supervise them till the age of 7, or when they are at an age when they are dextrous enough to tie their own shoe laces. When brushing, make sure you brush all surfaces of the teeth, make toothbrushing fun and keep little hands distracted. Singing songs and allowing your child to play with some bathroom toys or watching a toothbrushing timer are all great ways to keep little ones engaged. You do not need to spend a fortune on fancy or electric toothbrushes. Just a simple small headed manual toothbrush will be perfect. Big toothbrushes do not fit well in small toddler mouths.



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Tricky Brushers

Stay calm and relaxed when brushing with your child, getting stressed makes the battle worse. If your child hates brushing in the bathroom, who says you need to? Why not brush on the bedroom floor where they're nice and relaxed, just use a bowl to spit into. Bathtime is always a good time to brush too, or with lots of cuddles in a towel afterwards. I've found reward charts work well in our house, so why not have a tooth brushing chart? Just make sure your treat is sugar free.

Golden Hour

Introduce a golden hour before bed when your child has nothing to eat or drink (with the exception of water). Teeth should then be brushed before bedtime. Eating or drinking before bedtime means that sugars can sit on the teeth overnight increasing the risk of tooth decay. This is the same for anything the child drinks overnight. Overnight the only safe drink for teeth is water.

Safe Snacks

Aim to limit any foods or drinks which contain sugars and spend time planning healthy foods your child can snack on. This is really tricky as almost all foods have some sugar content. For healthy easy snacks try cucumber or carrot sticks, fresh fruit, plain crackers and cheese. For foods or drinks that are more processed and which tend to have added sugar in them, the best approach is to keep these to having at main meal times only. They will do less damage this way.

Try not to be caught out by clever wording on packaging. Lots of juices are marketed as "no added sugar". These drinks still contain lots of sugars which can be damaging to teeth, the drinks companies just do not add any more sugar to them. Look for "sugar free or 0% sugar" instead. Sugar free drinks will have lots of additives which can also impact on a healthy smile. The safest drinks for children during the day are water and milk.



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About the Contributor

Dr Hannah Walsh is a Media Spokesperson and Honorary Secretary of BSPD and Specialist in Paediatric Dentistry for Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. Dr Hannah might be more of familiar face to older children having recently appeared on CBBC's Newsround talking about the importance of Oral Health. Hannah is also a mother to a 3 year old boy and prides herself on spreading awareness of keeping baby teeth healthy by offering practical but effective dental advice for children and their families.

Dr Hannah Walsh Instagram: @miss__childrens__dentistry

About BSPD

BSPD has an established place in the dental profession thanks to the dedication of dentists with a passion for children's oral health stretching back over 70 years. BSPD's mission is to improve the oral health of children and young people in the UK. The Society engages with other special interest groups and political decision makers putting BSPD in a strong position to campaign for and implement improvements in children's oral health in the UK.

Website: www.bspd.co.uk
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