

## Looking After Your Own and Your Family's Oral Health:

### A Guide for Parents and Carers

Looking after your teeth and gums is important year-round, but as dentists are closed during coronavirus (Covid -19) except for emergencies, it is more important than ever. Even when some dental practices start to re-open from the 8 June 2020, this is likely to be for emergency treatment appointments only.

This short guide for parents and carers of children has been put together to help you to keep your own and your family's mouth healthy. It provides advice on;

- [Dental treatment during coronavirus](#)
- Oral care for different age groups;
  - [Babies \(3months - 18months old\)](#)
  - [Toddlers \(1 - 3years old\)](#)
  - [Older children and adults](#)
  - [Children and adults with additional needs](#)
- [Sugary foods and acidic drinks](#)
- [Looking after your gums](#)
- [Alcohol and oral health](#)
- [Smoking and oral health](#)
- [Visiting the dentist](#)
- [Links to further information](#)



### **Dental Treatment During Coronavirus (Covid-19)**

Although most dental practices are not open to routine appointments during coronavirus (Covid-19) it is possible to get emergency dental treatment and mouth care advice if you need it. It is vitally important that you follow NHS advice. If you do need to see a dentist in an emergency, public health guidance is in place to ensure that the risks are minimised as much as possible. For emergencies:

#### **If you have visited a dental practice in the last six months ...**

- ❖ Telephone them. They may have a telephone message or will answer your call.
- ❖ You will be told how you can get treatment if you need it urgently or given advice about your mouth health concerns.

#### **If you have not visited a dental practice in the last six months or more ....**

- ❖ Telephone the NHS 111 service
- ❖ You will be given the best help for your mouth health concern.
- ❖ A member of the dental team may ring you back if there is an urgent need for you to attend a 'dental hub' for treatment.

### What is an emergency?

- ❖ Some dental treatments are not essential and can be left to a later date
- ❖ After speaking with you, the dentist will decide if your problem is an emergency which requires an appointment.

### If you have had one the symptoms below for 3 weeks contact your dentist or NHS 111

These can be early warning signs of more serious mouth conditions:

- Sore tongue, non-healing mouth ulcers and /or red or white patches in the mouth
- Pain in the throat
- Persistent hoarseness
- Painful or difficulty swallowing
- Lumps in the neck
- Blocked nose on one side and/or bloody discharge from the nose



### Babies (3 months – 18 months old)

When you can see their teeth coming through, it is a good time to start cleaning them and introducing a cup in place of a feeding bottle. Like weaning, it is about getting your baby used to something being put in their mouth, new textures and tastes.

### Choose a time when your baby is not tired or upset

- ✓ Try to make tooth brushing part of an existing routine, such as; getting ready in the morning or to going to sleep for the night

### Choose a toothbrush with ...

- ✓ Soft bristles and a very small head
- ✓ A handle you can easily hold.
- ✗ Don't use toothpaste the first few times to give your baby time to get used to the feel of the toothbrush

### Hold your baby as though you are breast feeding or giving a bottle

- ✓ It will make your baby will feel safe and help you to easily control the toothbrush and look at them.



### Make it fun!

- ✓ Smile and giggle when brushing their teeth; try singing a short song or rhyme.
- ✓ Brush for a minute or less.
- ✓ Brush their gums as well as their teeth.

### After a few days, start to introduce toothpaste as part of your routine.

- ✓ Toothpaste especially for babies, has very little taste
- ✓ Use a very tiny amount, about the size of a grain of rice or just a smear
- ✗ Don't use water when you are brushing teeth. The saliva in the mouth will help toothpaste work.
- ✓ When you have finished, wipe their mouth dry with a soft cloth.



### Once dental surgeries re-open for routine appointments take them for their first visit

- ✓ Dental surgeries are different places with lots of new smells, sounds and sights

### Introduce drinking from a cup instead of a bottle. Weaning is good time to start

- ✗ Avoid giving your baby flavoured drinks
- ✗ They don't provide any nutritious benefit and can fill their small tummy up, so they may not want any foods which are important for them to grow and develop.
- ✓ Tap water is safe to give your baby once they are starting to crawl. It is the **best** drink for them.

### Choose the right cup for your baby

- ✓ A small cup which won't break when dropped and is easy for your baby to hold.
- ✓ With support your baby will learn how to hold and drink from a cup without a lid.
- ✗ Avoid any cup which has a no-spill lid.
- ✗ These are bottles in disguise and won't help your baby learn how to drink from a cup and may delay speech development.



### First teeth are at increased risk from harm if ...

- ✗ Babies are left through the night with a bottle to suck, if the content is flavoured, including milk

## Toddlers (1 – 3 years)

By 1 year old your baby should not need to use a bottle. As they get older, they will want to clean their own teeth which is fine. It is important to remember that young children are not able to do the complex wrist movements needed to brush teeth effectively.

### Keep to your tooth brushing routine

- ✓ Keep tooth brushing fun
- ✓ Ask if you can brush their teeth at the end, to make sure they have brushed all their teeth, including the ones right at the very back.
- ✗ Don't use toothpaste for sensitive teeth or whitening.
- ✓ Let your toddler check if you have cleaned all their teeth

## Remember sweet treats and flavoured drink can harm teeth

- It can take one year for tooth enamel (the white part you can see), to reach its mineral strength.
- ✗ New teeth, including first teeth, are most at risk from harm caused by sugary treats and flavoured drinks while they are growing. Avoid these.
- ✓ Encourage drinking tap water and nutritious meals



## Older Children and Adults

It is not until children reach the age of 7 years old that they are able to effectively brush their teeth without adult help. It is always worth checking if they are doing a good job. As children become more independent, they will make their own choices.

## Keeping your mouth clean; toothbrushing and toothpaste

Plaque bacteria can only be removed by brushing your teeth and gums. Doing this effectively can reduce your need for dental treatment.

- ✓ Brush your teeth and gums twice a day, especially before going to sleep.
- ✗ Don't share your toothbrush, it has your bacteria and viruses on it.
- ✗ Don't wet your toothbrush before you use it. Your saliva helps the toothpaste work.



- ✓ Only use a pea sized amount of toothpaste
- ✓ Place the bristles on your toothbrush at an angle to the brush
- ✓ Brush teeth and gums lightly, but firmly



- ✓ If your gums bleed when you brush them, bacteria is building up where teeth and gums meet, so brush gums as well as teeth
- ✓ Brushing your tongue when you have cleaned your teeth and gums helps to freshen your mouth and reduce plaque bacteria.
- ✓ After brushing teeth and gums spit out, **don't rinse**. Small amounts of toothpaste left behind will help to protect your teeth.
- ✓ Rinse your toothbrush in water when you have finished.

- ✓ Store toothbrushes away from the toilet and avoid brush heads coming into contact with each other. 'Social distance' them!
- ✓ When the toothbrush bristles start to become 'spread out', it's time for a new one.



- ✓ Used correctly a toothbrush should last around the same amount of time as a tube of toothpaste (3-4 months for a 75ml tube).
- ✓ Fluoride in toothpaste, green leafy foods and some tap water, helps to strengthen tooth enamel which protects teeth.
- ✓ A toothbrush will miss 35% of your tooth surface because the bristles cannot get in between each tooth. Flossing can help to clean in between each tooth. Ask your dentist the best way to do this.

## Children and Adults with Additional Needs



Regular mouth care is even more important for children and adults with an additional need. Of course, our teeth are the same, but providing mouth care and dental treatment can be more challenging. All the advice and guidance in this guide is still relevant, but if the person you are caring for is not able to brush their own teeth or tolerate toothbrushing you should seek advice from your dentist to help you and/or their carers.



## Sugary Foods and Acidic Drinks

Plaque bacteria feed on sugary foods and drinks to make acids which harm teeth and cause tooth decay. Acidic drinks will dissolve tooth enamel causing erosion. Saliva in the mouth helps to protect teeth, but it needs time to repair the damage done when sugary foods and acidic drinks are consumed. Download the free Food Smart app from Change4life to find out how much sugar there is in foods and drinks.

- ❖ It takes bacteria one minute to change sugary snacks/ foods and drinks into acid and begin harming teeth.
- ❖ Saliva needs about one hour to start to repair the harm this has done to teeth.
- ❖ Keep sugary foods and acidic drinks **to mealtimes, only**.
- ❖ Having sugary snacks, fizzy and fruit juices between meals, can harm teeth as well increasing weight. Try to avoid these as much as possible; making sure if that if you do have them, they are limited to one occasion only, straight after a meal and finish them as quickly as possible.
- ❖ It is really important to avoid eating sugary snacks for one hour before you sleep.
- ❖ Brush your teeth and gums before you go to sleep.

## ! Looking After Your Gums

Gums are as important as your teeth. If you don't look after your gums it can affect your general health, and so it is important to regularly brush them alongside your teeth. Bleeding gums can be an early sign of gum disease which is associated with some serious health outcomes.



## Alcohol

The Chief Medical Officer advises that the maximum weekly guideline for drinking alcohol for adults is 14 units spread across the week. Under 18's should not drink alcohol at all. Alcohol damages the teeth and gums, causing tooth decay, gum disease, tooth enamel erosion and mouth cancer. Drinking alcohol and using tobacco further increases the risks of mouth cancer. You can reduce the risk from these diseases by following the low risk drinking limits. Fourteen units means around 6 pints of regular strength beer or lager, or 6 standard glasses of wine or 7 double measures of spirits. It is important to have some alcohol-free days within the week too.



## Smoking

Smoking or chewing tobacco puts you more at risk of gum disease, yellow teeth, mouth cancer and tooth loss and decay. The best thing you can do for your health is stop smoking. There has never been a more important time to quit than right now. Covid -19 attacks the respiratory system. As smoking is known to cause many respiratory problems it puts smokers at greater risk of developing severe respiratory complications from the Covid -19 virus.

For **free** local support to help you stop smoking contact the Newcastle Stop Smoking + Service

- Tel: **0191 269 1103**
- Web: <https://newcastlestopsmoking.org.uk/>
- Email: [newcastle.stopsmoking@cgl.org.uk](mailto:newcastle.stopsmoking@cgl.org.uk)



## Visiting the Dentist

Visiting the dentist is important for everyone. If you look after your teeth and gums you will reduce the amount of dental treatment you may need.

### How often should you visit the dentist?

- The dentist will tell you how often this should be, depending on your specific dental health needs
- For adults it is normally anytime between every 3months and 2years
- For children up to 18years, twice a year is needed as the teeth are growing

### NHS Dental treatment is free for some people

- ✓ Pregnant women or women with a baby under one year old
- ✓ All children up to the age of 18years; twice a year
- ✓ Those on some government benefits



## Further Information

[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk) Search **teeth** to find a dentist or get more information about oral health.

[www.nhs.uk/change4life](http://www.nhs.uk/change4life) Find out about how to become sugar smart

[www.nhs.uk/smokefree](http://www.nhs.uk/smokefree) For information and support to quit smoking

[whatstheharm.co.uk](http://whatstheharm.co.uk) For more information about alcohol

[www.reducemyrisk.tv/](http://www.reducemyrisk.tv/) Try the Balance North East quiz about alcohol units.

<https://newcastle.gov.uk/citylife-news/families-supported-free-toothbrushes-and-new-oral-health-guide> Tips on looking after your teeth.

[www.newcastle.gov.uk/citylife-news/lifestyle/top-tips-help-families-manage-meals-budget](http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/citylife-news/lifestyle/top-tips-help-families-manage-meals-budget)  
Tips on feeding your family when on a low budget

Information correct in May 2020

Produced by the Public Health Team, Newcastle City Council and Oral Health Promotion,  
Newcastle Hospitals NHS Trust