

# ASK THE EXPERT

City Kids asks your health and well-being questions to a panel of experienced professionals.

## WHAT

DO I DO IF MY CHILD STARTS CHOKING?

Prevention is always key:

- Ensure that any play objects are safe, unbreakable and are too big to fit inside the mouth.
- If weaning, you may find that your baby occasionally gags. This gag reflex allows the food to move forward into the mouth and is normal.
- Supervise your child when eating - choking is often silent so you might not notice immediately.
- Always cut up food. Remember foods like tomatoes, grapes and blackberries are small and slippery so should be cut into quarters. Make sure children are sitting down whilst eating and drinking.
- If an object or food does get stuck in the throat and your child is coughing, it is called 'partial blockage'. You will know if your child is choking if they are unable to cough, cry or breathe. In this case, you should:
  - With a baby, sit down and lay them face down along your thigh supporting their head. Give up to five sharp blows between their shoulder blades with the heel of your hand. For an older child simply deliver the blows between the shoulder blades.
  - Check the mouth for the object. If you can confidently pick it out with your fingertips then do so, **but take great care not to push it in further.**
  - If the back blows do not clear the blockage, give up to five chest thrusts. With your baby laid face up along the length of your thigh, put two fingers just below the centre of the chest and push inwards up to five times. Check their mouth regularly and remove the object if possible.
  - If choking persists, repeat back blows and chest thrusts until you dislodge the object and they can breathe. Call for help as soon as possible.

## HOW

DO I KEEP MY CHILD'S TEETH HEALTHY?

I have six top tips to help with this!

1. Create a tooth brushing routine. A child who gets in the habit of brushing will carry that forward into adolescence and beyond. Children may initially resist, but most will eventually concede to the routine with consistent reinforcement.
2. Help kids aged eight years old and younger brush their teeth but supervise until age 11. The eight-year marker is approximate, but until children are able to tie their own shoes, they don't have the skills to brush their own teeth. Even after children are able to brush their own teeth, parents should be supervising to ensure children are doing a good job.
3. Visit the dentist regularly. We will reinforce that oral health is a critical part of overall health, as well as check for early signs of tooth decay. We'll also give parents strategies for taking care of their children's teeth, and issues like dental trauma and snacking.
4. Brush with fluoride. Buy toothpaste with fluoride for children two years old and up. Follow the recommended amount on the packaging - and then don't rinse! Have your children simply spit out the excess toothpaste. This will allow the fluoride to stay on their teeth, adding extra protection.
5. Limit sugar intake. The amount of sugar that is in kids' drinks and diets directly relates to the rise in tooth decay.
6. Model good behaviour. One of the best things parents can do for their kids' oral health is to take care of their own! Let children see how the whole family doesn't go to bed until teeth are brushed.

## AM I

TAKING A RISK IF I HAVE A HOME BIRTH?

No birth, like anything in life, is risk free. We all take risks on a daily basis: for example, when our phone goes for a swim every time we have a quick scroll through Instagram in the bath!

In terms of home birth, a huge nationwide study concluded that there was a small (but still very low overall) increase in risk of serious complications for healthy first-time mums; compared to giving birth in a labour ward. There was no increase in risk at all for healthy second-time mums.

There are so many positives to a home birth. As well as having lower rates of interventions, many women feel more relaxed with access to home comforts like their bed (and their fridge!) - allowing the "love hormone" oxytocin to be produced, which is key for labour. You won't need to worry about clean-up as your midwives will sort it before they leave (although only the birth-related stuff - The Marie Kondo declutter is up to you!).

The most important thing to bear in mind is that your choice of birth setting is the right one for you and your pregnancy. Most hospitals offer homebirth services, and some have dedicated homebirth teams. Alternatively, you may prefer to look into independent midwives - having the same midwife, who has been taking care of you during pregnancy, at the birth is priceless!

Beverley Turner - founder of the Happy Birth Club - had her first baby at a birth centre, then had two home births. She says "I knew my body could birth without complications so I believed that I should just give it a go at home. Of course, I would transfer into hospital should the need arise, and I knew that birth rarely 'goes wrong' quickly when you're receiving no interventions. They were the best days of my life. I'd do it all again (if I didn't have to raise the damn kids!)"



*Jenni Dunman is the founder of Daisy First Aid which offers paediatric first aid classes to families and carers. She is a former police officer and a mum of three based in Surrey. [daisyfirstaid.com](http://daisyfirstaid.com)*



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