



TEETH 101

Suzie Skipper, mum of four, asks children's dental experts for practical tips and advice on how best to look after your child's teeth and the key milestones to look out for.

WHEN TO BRUSH

When should you start brushing? Even before the first tooth erupts, says Dr Nicole Sturzenbaum, principal dentist and partner of Toothbeary toothbeary.co.uk a children-only dental practice. "You can massage the gum with a cotton swab as this will get rid of any bacteria, give relief from teething and get your child used to the 'tooth brushing' routine." Once the first tooth appears you need to start brushing. Try a little finger brush with a 'smear' of toothpaste, advises Dr Sturzenbaum.

Dentists agree that ideally you should brush your child's teeth twice a day. The most important times are after breakfast and last thing at night. Don't use water, just a dry toothbrush with a 'smear' of fluoride toothpaste for 0-2 years and a pea-size amount for age 3+ and to get the maximum effect from the fluoride toothpaste don't rinse! Make sure you brush teeth after drinking milk too.

THE DENTIST

It might seem OTT but ideally you should visit the dentist before you give birth to make sure your teeth and gums are healthy, especially if you are prone to decay or cavities. "Bacteria transfer between mother and child can happen easily when the mother licks a soother or spoon," says Dr Sturzenbaum. Your baby's mouth is neutral and sterile and you can pass on bacteria if you or anyone looking after your child has open cavities.

Take your baby to the dentist as soon as the first teeth come through or at least during their

first year, so that they get used to the sights and sounds of a dental surgery, advises Dr Maria Kalkani, Paediatric Dentist at Weymouth Street Paediatric Dentistry wpddentistry.co.uk. Dentists usually recommend six-monthly check-ups but this depends on your child's individual needs.

THE HYGIENIST

Dentists also recommend that your child has regular hygiene appointments from around 2-3 years. "Your child will learn about how to brush their teeth and understand that getting a gentle polish isn't scary," explains Dr Roksolana Mykhalus, Founder & Operations Director of Happy Kids Dental happykidsdental.co.uk. "We have a Toothbrushing Academy (Happy Kids Dental) for children up to 3 years. We show them how to brush their teeth in a fun and playful way, show parents where their children are not brushing sufficiently and how to correct their technique. After all, with toothbrushing it's all about developing a habit that will stay with them for life – and we think it's definitely worth investing your time in!"



WEANING & SNACKS

Aim to start getting your baby off the bottle and on to a cup as soon as you start weaning to solids at around six-months old. Try not to use a bottle after your child turns one and make their first foods savoury so they don't develop a 'sweet tooth'. Obviously, sugar is the enemy. However, it is the frequency of your child's sugar intake rather than the amount.

So best to limit sugary foods and juice to once a day with meals. Beware of hidden sugars in yoghurts and energy bars. Dried fruit like raisins also contain a



HOW TO BRUSH

Children don't have the manual dexterity to brush their own teeth until they are between 6-8 years, says Dr Mykhalus. "If your child can't write neatly or tie their shoe laces then they won't have the skills to brush their own teeth so they will still need parental supervision."

"Make brushing as fun as possible – maybe while you're watching something together or maybe in bed last thing at night," says Dr Kalkani. I used to pretend my toddler's mouth was a bus and I would talk about all the 'passengers' as I brushed round her mouth. Sticker charts are also a great way to incentivise a reluctant tooth brusher.

If you can get your child to brush for 2 minutes that's great but 30 seconds for younger children is equally good as long as they have brushed the surfaces. Once your child's adult teeth come in try to get them to brush for 2 minutes.

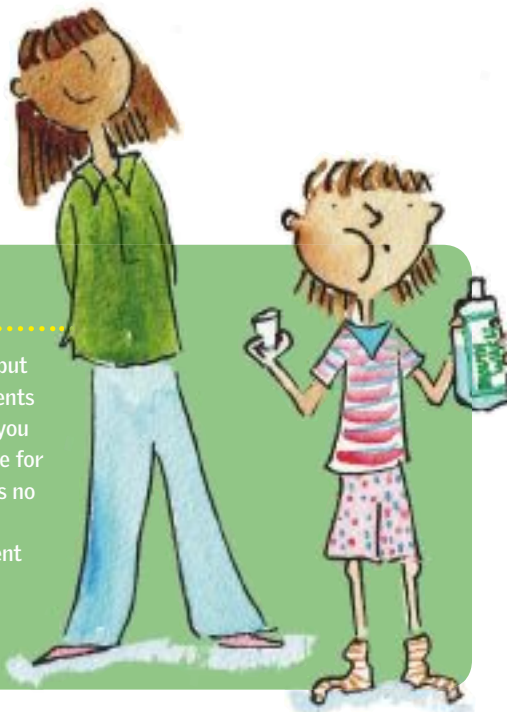
The best way to brush your child's teeth is to hold them firmly in your arms in a reclining position so you can see into their mouth. "If your child stands in front of you and moves while you are brushing you can hurt them and it will put them off," says Dr Sturzenbaum.



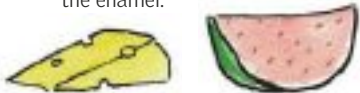
TOOTHPASTE & MOUTHWASH

"I see a lot of parents who have bought a lovely organic toothpaste for their baby or child but what they don't realise is that it doesn't contain fluoride!" says Dr Mykhalus. Fluoride prevents decay and helps to keep teeth healthy. London water does not have fluoride added to it so you need to make sure your child's toothpaste has a minimum of 1,000 parts per million fluoride for the under 3s while over 3s should use a toothpaste that contains 1,320-1,500 ppm. "It does no harm and has massive benefits for your child's teeth."

Get your child to rinse with an alcohol-free fluoride mouthwash once a day but at different times than toothbrushing, perhaps after snacks. Mouthwash contains less fluoride than toothpaste and it's important never to rinse toothpaste away otherwise you won't get the benefit of the fluoride, says Dr Kalkani.



lot of sugar and can stick in the teeth like toffee. Aim for snacks such as chopped-up vegetables or cheese which is good for your teeth. If your child is going to have something very acidic then don't get them to brush their teeth straight away as you can damage the enamel.



TOOTHBRUSHES

Always use a toothbrush that is right for your child's age. That way you know you have the correct size. "Your dentist should advise whether a manual or electric toothbrush is best for your child but you could use both once a day each," says Dr Mykhalus.

Ideally, manual toothbrushes are good for children until they are aged 6 or 7. Electric toothbrushes are fine from 3+ but if you don't buy a rechargeable one, change the batteries regularly.

FLOSSING

When to start flossing really depends on your child's teeth. Up until your child is about 6 their teeth are usually fairly widely spaced so there is no need to floss. "You can introduce flossing between 6-12 years, especially if your child has lots of permanent teeth and they are close together," advises Dr Mykhalus.

VARNISH & SEALANTS

Fissure Sealants are widely

regarded as one of the biggest contributors of preventing decay in children's teeth. Decay is most likely to develop on your child's molars when they first appear at the age of 6. The tooth's surface at this early stage has lots of grooves and deep pits called fissures. These fissures are often so narrow that it makes it very difficult to clean the tooth properly. Fissure sealants are a plastic coating which makes the surface of the tooth smooth making it difficult for decay to develop. Your dentist will check to see if they need to be re-sealed at each checkup.

Fluoride varnish is applied to your child's teeth often after a visit to the hygienist when the teeth are properly cleaned. The varnish contains 20 times more fluoride than toothpaste and helps to slow



down the development of decay. It also makes the enamel more resistant to acid attack from plaque bacteria and speeds up remineralisation ('remineralising' the tooth with fluoride ions, making the tooth's surface stronger and less soluble).

FILLINGS

If your child has a cavity and needs a filling it is probably best if your dentist explains the procedure to your child as you may run the risk of passing on any anxiety you may have. "Often children don't need injections but if they do your dentist will numb the area first," says Dr Kalkani.

EMERGENCIES

Seek advice on any dental emergency as soon as possible. Your dentist will have an emergency number and nowadays with smartphones you may even be able to send a picture of the injury direct to your dentist.

The golden rule to remember is if an adult tooth is knocked out, try to put it back in or put it in a glass of milk and go straight to see your dentist. However, never try to push a milk tooth back in as you may damage the permanent tooth that is already forming.

"You should always go to the dentist to check the baby tooth is completely out and there isn't a bone fracture or any other bone/soft tissue trauma," says Dr Sturzenbaum.

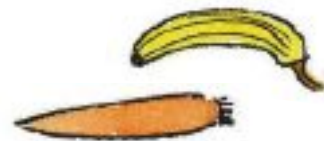
TEETH TIMING

Baby teeth are important as they hold on to the space for the big teeth. Baby molars will stay until your child is 11 or 12 so they have quite a long-life span and it is very important to look after them. Watch out for those first adult

molars which arrive at around age 6 and stay for the rest of your life! **6 Months** Bottom two are usually the first to appear.

36 Months All 20 baby teeth.

5-7 Years Adult teeth begin to arrive, usually back molars first.



TOP FIVE DENTAL TIPS

Don't breast or bottle feed your baby milk during the night beyond a year.

Get your baby/child used to visiting the dentist from a young age.

Use a minimum of 1,000 ppm fluoride toothpaste. Spit don't rinse after brushing.

Watch out for first permanent molars at around 6 (at the same time as first front baby teeth fall out) as they come in behind the baby molars without any teeth being lost.

Remember you can always get another Specialist Paediatric dentist's opinion.