Children’s teeth

Advice for children aged three to eleven years of age
Eating well

Having sugary foods or drinks between meals will cause your child’s teeth to decay. Limit any sugary foods or drinks to mealtimes. Between meals offer your child healthy sugar free foods and drinks that will not damage their teeth.

Plan a balanced diet for your child

Make sure your child has a healthy diet at times they are not with you such as when they are:
- at grandparent’s or childminder’s
- at nursery, pre-school or school
- at before and after school care/activities

Health promoting schools

The Government is encouraging schools to promote healthy eating as a part of the school day. Parents have an important role to play by:
- keeping to any rules the school has about foods and drinks from home
- ensuring your child has healthy snacks and drinks
- encouraging your child to have a school meal or provide a nutritious packed lunch based on the eatwell plate (see picture opposite)
- not sending into school sweet things for birthday treats

“Mum, I’m starving”

If your child is hungry at the end of the school day plan a healthy snack. Many snacks are high in fat and sugar and can ruin your child’s appetite.
Growing children need a varied diet that will help them learn, play, and enjoy life.

If you want to get the balance of your child's diet right, use the eatwell plate (see below).

The eatwell plate shows how much of what you eat is from everything you eat during the day.

- **Fruit and vegetables**
- **Meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein**
- **Foods and drinks high in fat and/or sugar**
The eatwell plate shows the types and proportions of foods we need, to have a healthy and well balanced diet. Having a varied diet in childhood can help your child maintain a healthy weight and keep teeth in good condition.

Bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods.

Milk and dairy foods.

Foods that should come from each food group. This includes day, including snacks and drinks.
Snacks and drinks

Most of the sugar in our diet comes from chocolate, sweets, drinks, breakfast cereals, biscuits and cakes.
Look after your child’s teeth and keep their body fit by choosing snacks and drinks that are sugar free, low in fat and salt.

Healthy snack ideas:

Pieces of fruit – apple, satsuma, banana, pear, grapes, melon, strawberries, plum, cherries, kiwi, nectarine and many more. Don’t give dried fruit between meals, it is very sugary and can damage teeth

Vegetable pieces – celery, carrot, cucumber, peppers and tomato

Bread – wholemeal, white, crusty bread, muffins, baps, pitta bread, toast, chapattis, crumpets

Assorted sandwich fillings – look for low fat options such as spreads, low fat cheeses, tuna, egg, homous, turkey

A long cool drink of the right stuff

Plain (not fizzy) water is great for quenching thirst, either tap or bottled is fine. Cold plain milk makes a satisfying drink that is full of goodness.

Keep any other type of drink to mealtimes

Fruit juice, smoothies, milkshakes (shop bought or homemade), bedtime milk drinks (except plain milk), cordial, flavoured water, sports and fizzy drinks can decay teeth. Even the no added, low or natural sugar types contain broken down fruit sugars, which may decay teeth. Many of these drinks including diet fizzy types can also dissolve the tooth’s surfaces this is called erosion.

Limit how often your child has any drink other than plain milk or water between meals.
Choose the right fluoride toothpaste

Avoid using a children's toothpaste, as they do not give full fluoride protection.

Choose a toothpaste that contains at least 1000 parts per million fluoride (ppmF), read the label. Family fluoride toothpastes that contain between 1350 – 1500 ppmF are the most effective at preventing dental decay.

For a child under the age of three years use a smear of family fluoride toothpaste (see picture).

For children three years and older use a pea size amount of family fluoride toothpaste (see picture).

Encourage your child to spit out and not rinse after brushing. This will leave small amounts of fluoride toothpaste in the saliva, which will help strengthen teeth.

Use the correct amount of family fluoride toothpaste for your child. Do not let your child eat toothpaste.
Get your child into the habit of brushing

Help your child brush their teeth until they are at least seven years old.

As your child gets older still check they are brushing their teeth properly.

Choose a small headed toothbrush, brush carefully the area where the teeth and gums meet.

Brush using a family fluoride toothpaste every night before they go to sleep and on one other occasion such as in the morning.

Gums may bleed when brushed. To stop the bleeding brush gently and thoroughly twice a day.

Brushing last thing at night can offer longer protection to teeth as the fluoride continues to work when your child is asleep.
Take the whole family to the dentist

Visit the dentist as often as your dentist recommends.

Find a dentist who is good with children.

Ask the dentist for advice on keeping teeth and gums healthy.

If you do not have a dentist, you can get more information by calling NHS Direct 0845 46 47 or visit the website www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

Many medicines for children contain sugar, which can damage teeth. Medicines such as cough medicine; pain and fever relief and most prescription medicines are available in pleasant tasting sugar-free varieties.

Always ask for sugar-free medicine.