Giving teeth a good start

Advice on dental care for young children
Having sugary foods or drinks between meals will cause your child’s teeth to decay. Get into a habit of keeping any sweetened foods or drinks to mealtimes. Between meals offer your child healthy sugar free snacks and drinks that won’t damage their teeth.

**Tips when choosing drinks**

- Breast milk or formula milk should be the main drink throughout the first year of life. From one year old you can start giving full fat cow’s milk. Don’t add anything to the milk.

- Soya based and follow on formula milks contain sugars and can damage teeth. Only give these milks if your doctor or health visitor recommends them.

- Water is a great drink to quench thirst between meals. In the UK it is best to give tap not bottled water for young children. Only give cooled boiled water to babies under six months of age when required, ask your health visiting team for advice.

- Diluted fresh fruit juice (one part juice to 10 parts water) can be given from six months of age at mealtimes. Never give between meals, as fresh fruit juice contains natural sugars, which can decay teeth. When given at mealtimes with iron rich food, fresh fruit juice can help the absorption of iron into the body. Always give in a cup not a bottle.
Protect your

- Take care with drinks such as cordials, squashes, fizzy drinks, baby drinks, flavoured water, flavoured milk drinks & smoothies as these all contain sugar and can decay teeth. Dilute cordials, squashes and baby drinks as much as you can. Only ever give milk or water between meals and keep any sugary drinks to mealtimes.

- Read labels to check for sugar: sucrose, glucose, fructose, honey, glucose syrup, dextrose and concentrated fruit juice are all sugars and can cause tooth decay. Artificial sweeteners are not recommended for young children. You may see these listed on drinks labels as saccharin, aspartame and acesulfame K.

- Never give any drinks except milk or water in a bottle. Any other drinks given in a bottle can quickly damage your child’s front teeth.

- Introduce a free flow feeder cup by six months and aim to have your child off the bottle by one year of age. Valved feeder cups (non spill types) are not recommended, as they can cause tooth decay and speech problems. As your child gets used to drinking from a feeder cup move them onto an open beaker.
Give them a healthy start

From about six months most babies are ready to move onto solids. As solid foods become a large part of your baby’s diet, it is important to offer a range of different foods to provide all the vitamins and minerals needed.

When you wean your child give a variety of savoury based dishes. Avoid giving sweetened foods, they are not as healthy and can encourage a liking for sweet foods. Eating a diet high in sugar can lead to obesity and tooth decay.

Most young children enjoy sweet things, but keep sweets, biscuits and chocolate for straight after meals.

You can reduce the amount of sugar you give by trying these as between meal snacks:

**Finger foods: 6 – 9 months**

Banana, pear, toast, chapatti, pitta bread, plain bread sticks, cooked mixed vegetables, small slices of cheese e.g. cheddar, cheese spread on bread.

'est drinks for young children
Finger foods: 9 – 12 months
As your child gets older you can offer more foods:
Tomato quarters, celery, carrots & pepper sticks or cucumber cubes. Pieces of apple, melon, orange, halved seedless grapes, plums or pineapple. Crumpets, toast, potato cakes, crackers, crisp bread or small cubes of cheese.

As your child grows
Toddlers should be eating a wide range of foods to provide a healthy diet. Snacks are an important part of their diet, be careful to keep snacks small to ensure that they are ready for their main meals of the day. Too much snack food can make your child fussy and not interested in mealtimes.
Get into the brushing habit

Start brushing your baby’s teeth as soon as they come through using a small soft brush. Brush your child’s teeth for them until they are seven years old. Always brush in the morning and last thing at night before bed. Up to the age of three use a smear of family fluoride toothpaste, when they are three you can use a pea size blob. Children’s toothpastes are very low in fluoride and may not protect your child’s teeth. Don’t let your child rinse with water after brushing, just encourage them to spit. Leaving fluoride in their mouth helps protect teeth from decay.

Brushing with family fluoride toothpaste last thing at night helps strengthen teeth as the fluoride can work whilst your child is asleep.
Teething problems
If your child has problems when they are teething you can give a cooled teething ring to chew on.
Sugar free teething gel or sugar free pain relief medicine can help.
Many medicines for children contain sugar, which can damage teeth. Always ask your doctor or pharmacist for sugar free medicine.

Take your baby to the dentist
It’s never too early to start taking your baby to the dentist. Get them used to going to the dentist whilst they are young and ask for advice for caring for their teeth. Ask family or friends to recommend a dentist who is good with children. Take your children to have their teeth checked as often as your dentist recommends.
Look after your child’s smile

- Provide a varied diet for your child to give them the best start in life.
- Limit how often they have sugary foods and drinks.
- Give plain milk or water as a drink.
- Make a habit of brushing your child’s teeth with a family fluoride toothpaste every morning and last thing at night.
- Take young children to the dentist as often as your dentist recommends.