healthy gums for life

a guide for

adults

of all ages
Toothbrushing

Spend an extra few minutes brushing your teeth every day to keep them really clean.

Toothbrush tips

- Choose a soft or medium (not hard) brush with a small head to reach all those difficult corners. Don’t share brushes.
- Change your brush at least every three months. Worn out brushes do not clean properly.
- Brush teeth twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste to help strengthen your teeth.

Cleaning tips

- Place the bristles of the toothbrush where the teeth and gums meet.
- Then move the toothbrush back and forward using small, gentle movements. This will remove plaque, a layer of germs, from where it collects at the gum region.
- Hold the toothbrush as you would a pen so that you don’t brush too hard. Use a finger grip, not a fist grip.
- Don’t hurry. Make time to clean every tooth surface. Get in the habit of cleaning each part of your mouth in turn. Clean your teeth and gums in the same order every time so you don’t miss anywhere.
- Always remove partial dentures before you brush, and clean them separately.

Clean teeth and healthy gums give you the confidence to get close to people.
Gum problems

If you ever have the following symptoms, here's what you can do.

- If your gums bleed when you brush your teeth don’t panic. This happens when you don’t brush away all the plaque or germs from where your teeth and gums meet. The germs left behind inflame the gums and make them bleed. Keep brushing the problem areas gently. The bleeding should soon stop. If there’s no improvement ask the dentist for help.

- In pregnancy hormonal changes may make gum problems worse. Take extra care to brush thoroughly. Remember, NHS dental treatment is free for expectant mums and for one year after giving birth.

- Smoking makes gum disease worse, and may mask early signs and symptoms.

- If you are a smoker with gum problems think about cutting down or giving up.

- Many people have sensitive teeth. If your gums recede slightly to expose part of the root, your teeth may hurt when you take hot or cold food or drinks. Toothpaste for sensitive teeth can often help; use your fingertip to rub a little toothpaste where teeth and gums meet. If the problem continues for more than six weeks ask the dentist for help.

- Bad breath may improve with thorough daily toothbrushing. If not, visit the dentist for extra cleaning, advice on toothbrushing and to check for other problems.

- Loose teeth - you need a dentist’s help. Keep your teeth as clean as possible and seek advice.

A great smile starts with healthy teeth. Look after your mouth.
Extra help with mouth cleaning

If you suffer from any gum problems, the following can help:

- Some **mouth rinses** help keep mouths clean but others are less useful. Your dentist or pharmacist can tell you what type of mouth rinse will help.

- **Special toothpastes** may help cure sensitivity or prevent gum problems. Always make sure they contain fluoride. The British Dental Association approves brands that meet certain standards.

- **Floss, dental sticks and mini-brushes** are useful for some people. Consult your dentist or hygienist to check if you need to use them and how best to do it.

- **Disclosing tablets** will show where you have left plaque, or germs, on your teeth after brushing. The dentist or hygienist will explain how to use them.

- **Electric toothbrushes** can be useful for people who have problems holding an ordinary brush.

Making the most of your dentist

Your dentist and hygienist can:

- Check that you’re cleaning effectively.

- Clean stains off your teeth.

- Remove calculus or tartar. This is hard deposit that sometimes forms on your teeth. Once it builds up it is impossible for you to keep your mouth really clean.

- Advise you whether you need to use other oral hygiene aids.

Finding a dentist

- Ask family and friends to recommend one.

- If you cannot find a dentist contact your local Health Authority or Community Health Council for more information. The telephone number will be in the phone book.
Further information

Other leaflets on oral health published by the Health Education Authority include:

Looking after your mouth (general advice for everyone)

Keeping baby teeth healthy: Tooth care for 0 to 2 year-olds

Caring for your children’s teeth: Tooth care for 3 to 11 year-olds

Remember:

- Brush your teeth and gums thoroughly twice a day.
- If your gums bleed and extra brushing doesn’t help, see your dentist.
- The dentist and hygienist are there to help you keep your mouth healthy. Have a check-up every year.