

Keeping your mouth fresh & healthy

It is easy to get your mouth clean and healthy, and keep it that way. A simple routine can help prevent most dental problems

- brushing your teeth last thing at night and at least one other time during the day, with a fluoride toothpaste
- cleaning between the teeth with 'interdental' brushes or floss at least once a day
- good eating habits - having sugary foods and drinks less often, and
- regular dental check-ups.

Although most people brush regularly, many don't clean between their teeth and some people don't have regular dental check-ups. A few small changes in your daily routine can make a big difference in the long term. Your dental team can remove any build-up on your teeth and treat any gum disease that has already appeared. But daily dental care is up to you, and the main weapons are the toothbrush, toothpaste and interdental cleaning (cleaning between your teeth).

What is plaque?

Plaque is a thin, sticky film of bacteria that constantly forms on your teeth.

How can plaque cause decay?

When you eat foods containing sugars and starches, the bacteria in plaque produce acids, which attack tooth enamel. The stickiness of the plaque keeps these acids in contact with your teeth. After constant acid attack, the tooth enamel breaks down forming a hole or cavity.

How can plaque cause gum disease?

If plaque is not removed by brushing, it can harden into something called 'calculus' - another name for it is 'tartar'. As calculus forms near the gumline, the plaque underneath releases harmful poisons causing the gums to become irritated and inflamed. The gums start to pull away from the teeth and the gaps become infected. If gum disease is not treated promptly, the bone supporting the teeth is destroyed, and healthy teeth can become loose and fall out. Severe gum disease can lead to teeth falling out and needing to be replaced.

How can I prevent gum disease?

It is important to remove plaque and bits of food from around your teeth as this will stop your gums from becoming inflamed and swollen, and becoming infected. If you leave plaque on your teeth it can harden into tartar, which can only be removed by the dental team. It is important to keep up your regular appointments so that your teeth can have a thorough cleaning if they need it.

Which type of toothbrush should I use?

One of our team will be able to recommend a toothbrush suitable for you. However, adults should choose a small sized brush head with soft to medium bristles. The head should be small enough to reach into all parts of the mouth: especially the back of the mouth where it can be difficult to reach. Children need to use smaller brushes.

There are also smaller-headed toothbrushes for people with crooked or irregular teeth and larger handled toothbrushes for people with limited grip due to Parkinson's disease or a physical disability.

Do electric toothbrushes clean better?

Tests have shown that electric toothbrushes are more effective at removing plaque. Everyone can use a power brush. They are particularly useful for people with limited movement of the arm or hand, such as disabled or elderly people, who often find that using a normal toothbrush does not allow them to clean thoroughly. Electric brushes can also be better for children as they may be more likely to brush regularly because of the novelty of using a power brush.

What sort of toothpaste should I use?

It is important to use a fluoride containing toothpaste and just spit, not rinse after brushing to leave the fluoride on the teeth. A pea sized amount is enough. Children under the age of three should use a smear of toothpaste with a lower concentration of fluoride (1000 parts per million) and be encouraged not to swallow toothpaste. 'Whitening' toothpastes are good at removing staining to help restore the natural colour of your teeth, but are not strong enough to change the natural shade of the teeth. Sensitive toothpastes are good at preventing the discomfort of sensitive teeth.

How should I clean between my teeth?

You should clean between your teeth with an 'interdental' brush at least once per day. Cleaning in between your teeth removes plaque and bits of food from between your teeth and under your gumline - areas a toothbrush can't reach. When using interdental brushes, keep to a regular pattern and try not to miss any teeth. It helps to look in the mirror. Don't forget the backs of your last teeth. It is also very important to clean around the edges of any crowns, bridges or implants.

Interdental brushes come in various sizes. We can help you find the correct sizes for your mouth.

Hold the interdental brush between your thumb and forefinger. Gently place the brush through the gap between your teeth. Do not force the brush head through the gap. If the brush splays or

bends then it is too big - you will need a smaller brush head for this space.

Should I use a mouthwash?

Most people do not need a mouthwash but some people do. These are people at a higher risk of tooth decay who will benefit from a fluoride mouthwash and people at a higher risk of gum disease who will benefit from an antibacterial mouthwash. If you find that you are regularly using a mouthwash just to freshen your breath speak to us because bad breath can be a sign of unhealthy teeth and gums or of poor general health.

Can my diet help?

Many people think that it is a high level of sugar in your diet that causes decay, but this is not true. It is how often you have sugar in your diet, not the amount, that causes problems. It takes up to an hour for your mouth to cancel out the acid caused by eating and drinking sugar. During this time your teeth are under attack from this acid. It is therefore important to limit the number of attacks by having sugary foods and drinks just at mealtimes. Chewing sugar-free gum and drinking water after meals or snacks can also help to cancel out the acid more quickly.

As well as causing decay, sugary fizzy drinks, fruit juices, sports drinks, and wine can be acidic - which can also cause 'dental erosion'. This is when the acid in foods and drinks gradually wears away the hard enamel coating of the tooth. This may lead to the tooth being sensitive.

Why should I visit my dental practice regularly?

It is always better to prevent problems rather than have to cure them when they happen. If you visit your dental team regularly you will need less treatment and they will spot any problems earlier, making any treatment easier.



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