

# FACTSHEET



This fact sheet is for education purposes only. Please consult with your doctor or other health professionals to make sure this information is right for your child. If you would like to provide feedback on this fact sheet, please visit: <https://www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/fact-sheets/feedback-form>.

## Caring for your child's teeth

**Tooth decay:** The main cause of tooth decay is an acid attack on the surfaces of the teeth. This acid is produced by bacteria which cling to the surface of the teeth in a film called dental plaque.

Sweet, sticky, sugary foods help the plaque to make acid which causes tooth decay and bleeding gums.

### Cleaning teeth

Children need to learn how to clean their teeth. Start off by giving your baby a small toothbrush as a toy - bath time is a good time. Start to clean your baby's teeth as soon as they appear. Use a small, soft toothbrush and water. When your child is one year old, start putting small amounts of junior fluoride toothpaste on the brush. Just put a small smear of toothpaste on the toothbrush. It is best that your child cleans their teeth the last thing before bed.

It is hard for children under ten to clean their teeth properly. You will need to help at least once a day. If the bacteria have been on the teeth for a long time, the gums may bleed when brushed. This is called gingivitis and tells you that the gums are unhealthy. To get them healthy again the gums need to be cleaned more often, even if they bleed when brushed.

### Dental floss

You may need to clean between your child's teeth with dental floss. Ask your dentist to show you how to use the floss properly.

### When to visit the dentist

Take your child to the dentist regularly, starting from about one year of age. Going to the dentist is safe and can save you money in the long run.

All children under 18 and who are eligible for Medicare can access public dental services in NSW. Some children may also be eligible for the Commonwealth's Child Dental Benefits Schedule.

This program gives eligible children and teenagers access to up to \$1,000 in benefits for dental services over two calendar years.

For more information visit:

<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/oralhealth/Pages/child-dental-benefits-schedule.aspx>



## Tips to prevent dental disease

Here are some tips to prevent decay and sore gums for children:

- Avoid putting infants and young children to bed with a bottle. Make sure feeding has finished before your child goes to sleep to avoid early infant tooth decay.
- Drink fluoridated tap water every day. If you are not sure if your local water is fluoridated, check with your local council.
- Avoid eating sugary, sticky foods, especially between meals.
- Avoid sweet drinks and juices, especially between meals.
- Give your child foods which make them chew.
- Brush twice a day - after breakfast and before bed (use a small toothbrush and a small amount of fluoridated, junior toothpaste).
- If there's no toothbrush, rinse with water or wipe toothpaste on the teeth.
- Use dental floss daily from about 3-4 years of age.
- Visit your dentist regularly.
- Do not put honey or anything else on dummies to get your child to sleep.

## Dental emergencies

### Toothache

If your child has a toothache or a hole in a tooth, start regular ibuprofen or paracetamol to control the pain and contact the dentist for an appointment as soon as possible. Tooth decay can easily lead to an infection which is very painful for your child.

### Bleeding

If your child's gums bleed during tooth-brushing take your child to the dentist as soon as possible. This bleeding can be caused by lack of proper care for the teeth, or it may be a symptom of a medical condition. Your dentist can check this and advise you.

### Injury

If your child falls and hurts a tooth, take them to the dentist quickly. If the teeth are loose, especially the permanent teeth, they need to be replaced in the socket and splinted as soon as possible. The sooner the tooth is back in place the better its chance of survival in the long term. Do not try to replace a baby tooth.

## If a permanent tooth is knocked out

Take your child to the nearest dentist or hospital with the tooth/teeth in milk or saline.

The sooner the tooth is replaced, the higher the chance for tooth survival:

- Hold the tooth by the crown
- If dirty, rinse the tooth, in milk or saline while holding the tooth crown (use water as a last resort)
- Do not scrub or touch the root of tooth
- Replace the tooth in the socket
- Make sure that the tooth is not back to front. You can check this against the next tooth or someone else's front tooth.
- Take your child to a dentist or hospital straight away so they can splint the tooth in place.

### Remember

- Brush twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste, (low fluoride toothpaste for under six year olds).
- Drink fluoridated water every day and limit the drinking of soft drinks and fruit juices.
- Visit your dental health provider regularly.
- Limit sweet snacks between meals.