

Children 3 to 12 years guide to oral health

Children 3 to 12 Years

By the time your child is 3 years of age, they will have all of their baby (deciduous) teeth – that's 20 teeth.

Taking care of baby teeth is important as some could be in the mouth until 12 years. Baby teeth help to keep space for the adult teeth to come through.

Between the ages of 6 and 12 years, your child will have lost those baby teeth and will have 28 permanent adult teeth.

You only get one set of adult teeth and they need to last for another 70 to 80 years! Forming good healthy habits in the early years will ensure your child has the best chance of keeping those teeth healthy for a lifetime.

Brushing and Flossing

Encourage your child to brush twice a day: once in the morning and just before bedtime. Bedtime brushing ensures that plaque and acids are not sitting on teeth all night causing damage to enamel.

Once gaps between teeth begin to close up, flossing is vital to remove plaque stuck between teeth.

Parents will have to help and supervise brushing and flossing until the child has the dexterity to effectively brush and floss – at about 8 or 9.

Fluoride Toothpastes

Fluoride in toothpaste gives added protection to teeth throughout life. Fluoride strengthens the enamel against decay and can also reverse early stages of decay.

Up to the age of 6, it is recommended that children use low fluoride toothpaste as children of this age tend to swallow toothpaste rather than spit it out.

Sealants – Preventing Decay

A sealant is a hard plastic coating applied to the pits and fissures (grooves) on the chewing surfaces of teeth. It is used as a barrier to protect the grooves from decay. The grooves on our teeth are a major site of decay because the bristles on a toothbrush are too large to clean in these grooves.



Grooves on Molar Teeth

Sealants are best placed on teeth with deep grooves like back teeth (molars and premolars) as soon as they come through. The first permanent molars erupt at about age 6 and the second molars at age 12. In some cases, baby molars may be sealed if the enamel has been damaged.

Good Food Habits

Starting good eating habits at the outset is a great idea to ensure a healthy child with healthy teeth.

Limiting snacks through the day helps to decrease the chances of tooth decay, especially if the snacks are low in sugar, starch or acids – even in 'natural' foods and drinks.

Daily Diet and Tooth Decay

The rate of tooth decay has declined mainly due to fluoridated water but it is still a problem with some children.

Plaque which is a sticky film of bacteria is constantly forming on our teeth. When we consume foods or drinks that contain sugar or starch, the bacteria in plaque produces acids which attack the tooth enamel. The stickiness of plaque keeps the harmful acids against the teeth, contributing to decay.

Healthy Eating

To keep your child's smile healthy, limit snacks and give nutritious, well-balanced meals made up of foods from the 5 major food groups:

- Breads, cereals and grains
- Fruits
- Vegetables
- Meat, fish, poultry or protein alternates
- Milk, cheese or yoghurt

A balanced diet includes a variety of foods that give your child's body all the nutrients

