



Steps to helping your child's dental health

What do we know?

Tooth decay is the most common and chronic disease in children. Findings from Public Health England found that a **quarter of children** experience tooth decay by the age of 5 years! Often having 3 or 4 teeth affected. Oral hygiene affects your child's ability to eat, sleep, talk and play. It also affects how they feel about themselves.



Baby teeth really matter! Children that have high levels of decay in their primary teeth, have a significantly increased risk of disease in their adult teeth.



Children are more at risk of developing tooth decay if they are:

- Eating a poor diet and are having sugary snacks between meals.
- If they drink sugary drinks through a bottle or sippy cup.
- Brush their teeth less than twice per day without toothpaste.
- If they brush their teeth on their own, without the help of an adult.

How do parents and help their child and prevent tooth decay?

- Reduce consumption of food and drinks that contain sugar.
- Brush teeth at least twice a day, last thing at night and once on another occasion. Under 3's should use a smear of toothpaste (at least 10000ppm) and over 3's a pea sized amount (1000-1500ppm).
- Parents should brush or supervise brushing; stand/sit behind or above your child, so that you can see where they are brushing. Supervise your child until they are at least 7 years old.
- Take your child to the dentist when their first tooth erupts, at about 6 months and then on a regular 6-month basis. There are free NHS appointments available for children.

What else can be done to support the growth of healthy teeth?

Public Health England recommend that:

- Breast milk is the only food or drink babies need for around the first 6 months of their life. First formula milk is the only suitable alternative to breast milk
- Bottle-fed babies should be introduced to drinking from a free-flow cup from the age of 6 months and bottle feeding should be discouraged from 12 months old.
- Only breast or formula milk or cooled, boiled water should be given in bottles.
- Only milk or water should be drunk between meals and adding sugar to foods or drinks should be avoided.



Ideas that parents have tried:

- **Find** Buy a special free flow / open cup for them to use, starting as near to 6months as you can. Good option is a Doidy cup.
- **Start** by only putting **1cm** of drink in the cup, ideally water or milk. If they spill it, it doesn't matter. It will take time to practice and learn how to drink from a cup.
- **Swap** pop/cordial, for a fruit juice, but *dilute it*. You can gradually increase how much you dilute it with water over time as their craving for sugar decreases.
- **Reduce** when they use their bottle; just at bed time and only with milk/water in.
- **Avoid** using sports bottles or sippy cups to sooth or occupy your child. Prolonged sipping of juice instead of drinking allows sugars to continually attack their teeth.
- **Be a good role model**, use open cups rather than bottles, drink healthy options, show them how you clean your teeth and visit the dentist together!