

Toothbrushing for Children

Brushing your child's teeth well from an early age helps protect them from tooth decay and sets lifelong habits. Use fluoride toothpaste, supervise brushing, and keep things fun and consistent.

- Use fluoride toothpaste (1000–1500 ppm).
- Brush twice daily, including last thing at night.
- Brush for around 2 minutes.
- Clean inside, outside, and biting surfaces.
- Spit, don't rinse after brushing.
- Supervise brushing until at least age 7.
- Use the right amount of toothpaste for your child's age.
- Choose a toothbrush your child can comfortably use.

Why toothbrushing matters

Good brushing helps remove plaque, protect teeth from decay, and build healthy habits that follow children into adulthood. Fluoride toothpaste strengthens the enamel and reduces the risk of cavities.

Key points at a glance

- Fluoride toothpaste is essential for preventing tooth decay.
- Younger children need hands-on help.
- Timing brushing helps ensure every area is cleaned.
- Brushing routines become easier with consistency and positive encouragement.

How much toothpaste to use

- Under 3 years: a smear of fluoride toothpaste.
- Ages 3–6: a petit pois-sized amount.
- Age 6 and over: a pea-sized amount.

Choosing toothpaste: children vs adult

Children may find adult mint toothpaste “spicy.” Mild-flavoured children's toothpastes are fine as long as they contain the correct fluoride level.

What strength fluoride toothpaste to use

All children should use toothpaste containing 1000–1500 ppm fluoride.

Areas with fluoridated water:

Toothpaste with 1000 ppm fluoride is suitable.

Areas without fluoridated water:

Use toothpaste containing 1400–1500 ppm fluoride.

What type of toothbrush to choose

Pick an age-appropriate brush with a small head. Electric toothbrushes are fine if they encourage better brushing.

Step-by-step brushing guidance

- Brush twice daily: before bed and one other time.
- Brush all surfaces: inside, outside, and biting surfaces.
- Encourage gentle, systematic brushing.
- Spit out after brushing – do not rinse.

Timing brushing: practical ways to help

- Use a phone stopwatch.
- Play a favourite 2-minute song.
- Use an electric toothbrush with a timer.
- Try brushing apps such as Brush DJ or the Oral-B Disney Magic Timer.
- Use egg timers or musical timers.

What supervised brushing means

Supervise brushing until at least age 7. Adults should brush younger children's teeth and gradually guide older children towards independence.

How to use disclosing tablets

Disclosing tablets stain plaque pink, helping children see where they need to brush better.

Should children use mouthwash?

Mouthwash is not necessary for children and does not replace brushing with fluoride toothpaste.

Do children need to floss?

Flossing is usually introduced during the teenage years when teeth sit closer together.

When to visit the dentist

Take your child to the dentist shortly after their first tooth appears (around 6 months old).

How often should check-ups be?

Most children should see a dentist every 6 months. Higher-risk children may be seen every 3 months.

Key actions

- Brush twice daily with fluoride toothpaste.
- Use the correct amount of toothpaste.
- Supervise brushing until at least age 7.
- Time brushing for 2 minutes.
- Brush all tooth surfaces.

When to see a dentist or DCP

- Toothache, sensitivity, swelling, or spotting on teeth.
- Difficulty brushing or persistent refusal.
- Concerns about fluoride or brushing technique.

Adapted for dentalhealthservice.net.