

- Children—dental care

## Protecting that smile

### HOW TO LOOK AFTER CHILDREN'S DENTAL HEALTH, AS NEW REPORT CALLS FOR 'RADICAL' MEASURES. BY CAMILLA FOSTER

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MANY children love munching on sugary snacks – but will this cost them in the future?



Tooth decay is the most common reason for hospital admissions among five to nine-year-olds, and a new report from the Child of the North project and the Centre for Young Lives is urging the Government to take “radical” action.

The report strongly advises the Government to develop a national child oral health strategy with a focus on reducing sugar consumption. But what can we do at home to make sure our children's teeth and gums stay healthy?

#### 1. Get regular dental check-ups

“I'd recommend that children visit the dentist at least once every six months for a routine check-up,” advises Dr Nyree Whitley, chief clinical officer at mydentist. “However, the frequency of visits can change depending on the child's oral health needs or requirements. If there are signs of tooth decay, your dentist will recommend more frequent appointments and tailored advice on treatment options.”

#### 2. Set an example

Be positive about the dentist.

“Children are so perceptive and will mirror your reactions, especially if you fear going to the dentist yourself,” says Anni Seaborne, head of general dentistry for Bupa Dental Care. “Try to stay calm, relaxed, and explain that a visit to the dentist is fun, and that the dentist is a caring person who is there to help. Familiarity fosters better relationships with the dentist.”

#### 3.

Many familiar lunch box snacks contain a lot of sugar.

“Dried fruit has a particularly high sugar content, and the consistency means that it can often stick to and become lodged in your teeth,” explains

Be mindful of snack choices

Anni. “If you do have dried fruit, it could be a good idea to rinse your mouth with water afterwards.” Cheese is a good alternative. “Cheese has a number of benefits for your teeth, including high levels of phosphate and calcium, which naturally strengthen teeth and bones,” explains Anni. “In addition, cheese helps balance the pH level in your mouth, which means less harmful acid, more cleansing saliva, and as a consequence, better protection against dental decay.”

#### 4. Cut down on sweet food and drinks

“Avoid over-consuming sugar to prevent damage to their enamel,” says Dr Whitley. “Try to opt for chocolate instead of sweets and keep their overall sugar intake and frequency of consumption to a minimum, without restricting their enjoyment of treats.” Intake of sugary drinks should also be limited. “Although fruit-based juices sound healthy, they contain high levels of sugar, so should be consumed in small amounts,” says Anni.

#### 5. Make twice a day brushing a rule

“Ideally, children should brush their teeth with fluoride toothpaste for two minutes, twice a day,” says Dr Whitley. “I’d recommend using a soft to medium bristle children’s toothbrush to ensure it is the right size for them.”

#### 6. Brush your teeth at the same time as your child

Keep their sugar intake to a minimum with restricting their enjoyment of treats. Dr Nyree Whitley “Brushing your teeth with your children is the best way to ensure they learn how to do it properly, once they are old enough to do so themselves,” says Dr Whitley. “Show them how to move the toothbrush around the teeth at the front and back of their mouths to ensure a thorough clean.”

#### 7. Think about teeth brushing timing

“If you drink or eat sugar and then immediately brush your teeth, you can damage your enamel and heighten your risk of tooth decay or cavities,” highlights Dr Whitley. “That’s why I’d recommend that parents teach their kids that they brush their teeth before eating breakfast, to ensure that if they drink any apple or orange juice, they won’t go and brush their teeth immediately afterwards.”