

# A Guide to Children's Teeth

3 years and older

By the Oral Health Improvement Department

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## Teeth are very important (even milk teeth)

Although these teeth are temporary they are just as important as adult teeth because they aid speech, allow children to eat a varied healthy diet, give them confidence in their appearance and hold the space for the adult teeth.

Studies have shown that poor oral health can significantly increase the risk of certain diseases such as heart disease, stroke, lung disease and diabetes, as well as contributing to obesity. It is therefore important to care for the mouth.

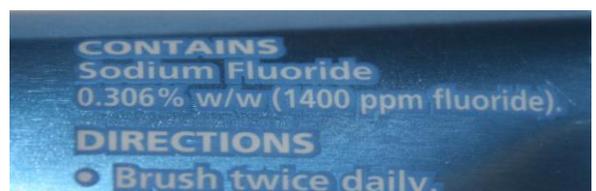
## Three ways to prevent dental disease

- \* **Brush children's teeth and gums twice a day with fluoride toothpaste.**
- \* **Keep sugary foods and drinks to mealtimes only.**
- \* **Visit the dentist regularly.**

## Tooth paste

For children **aged 3 years** and above use a pea-sized amount of toothpaste containing **1,350 – 1,500 parts per million (ppm) of fluoride**, which is the amount found in standard adult toothpaste.

Fluoride levels can be found within the ingredients. Look on the box or tube to ensure you are using the correct levels.



## Tooth brushing

Children will need help with brushing until they are at least seven years old.

Use an age appropriate brush, with a small head and soft bristles.

Brush twice a day cleaning all tooth surfaces for 2 minutes - Especially at bedtime (teeth need to be as clean as possible overnight to prevent decay).

Try to use a gentle circular motion and aim to make brushing fun.

Brush gums as well to prevent gum disease

Always use fluoride toothpaste. Fluoride strengthens teeth, and helps to protect them from decay.

It is best to use a mint flavoured paste as many sweet tasting pastes do not contain enough fluoride and they encourage children to eat more of the paste which might be harmful.

Use a pea sized amount of toothpaste



### Tooth brushing:

Brush the outside (1), the chewing surface (2) and inside (3) of each tooth.



**Encourage spitting out after brushing, rather than rinsing with water, this will allow the fluoride to work more effectively.**

## Tooth decay

**Sugar + Plaque bacteria = Acid = DECAY**

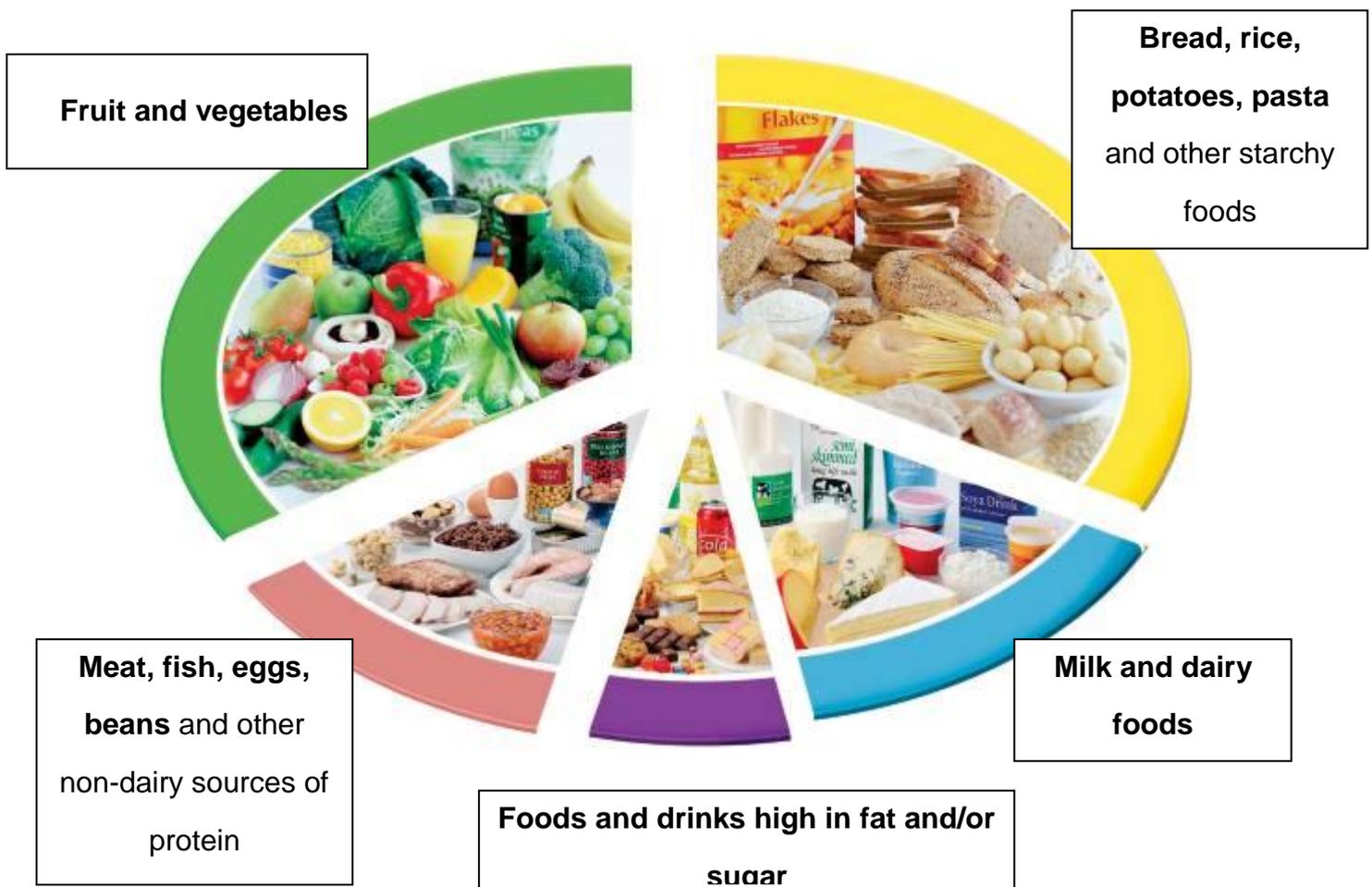
### Sugar in food & drink

The risk of tooth decay increases with the number of times that teeth are exposed to sugar each day (in both food and drink).

It is best to limit foods and drinks containing sugar to main mealtimes, this allows time between meals for saliva to help neutralise (get rid of) the acid and minimise the damage caused.

### Meal Times

It is important for health and development that children have a varied and healthy diet. The Eatwell plate shows the proportions of the different food groups that we should eat over 1-2 days.



A healthy balanced diet contains a variety of types of food, including lots of fruit, vegetables and starchy foods such as wholemeal bread and wholegrain cereals; some protein-rich foods such as meat, fish, eggs and lentils; and some milk and dairy foods and just a small amount of foods and drinks high in fat and/or sugar.

For further information please visit : [www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Goodfood/Pages/eatwell-plate.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Goodfood/Pages/eatwell-plate.aspx)

## Snacks

**To reduce the risk of tooth decay it is important to limit sugary foods and drinks to meal times only.**

If a snack is given, choose foods such as fresh fruit; raw vegetables; cheese; crackers or other savoury bread based products.



- Be aware that in dried fruit, the sugar has been altered and can cause decay, so please keep to mealtimes only.
- Water and milk are the only drinks we recommend between meals.
- Fruit juice is acidic so should be given at mealtimes only and diluted with water.
- Do not give sugary drinks at or before bedtime because of the risk of decay.
- When giving medicines or cough sweets to a child, remember to make sure you choose a sugar-free variety.
- Try not to give your child sweets as treats or rewards. Provide alternatives such as stickers, comics, crayons, read a story or play together etc.
- If your child attends a nursery ask to see a copy of their food policy as most nurseries will be following healthy food provision guidelines.

**Make healthy choices easy for your child by having fresh fruit and vegetables readily available.**

## Visiting the Dentist

A child should visit the dentist regularly. They should have a check-up at least once a year.

Treatment is free under the NHS for all children.

A dentist will give advice specifically about helping your child to avoid tooth decay. This might include how to brush their teeth and/or applying a fluoride varnish directly to the teeth. When their adult teeth come through they may suggest protecting these teeth with a protective coating called fissure sealant.

To find an NHS dentist in Bucks log on to [www.nhschoices.nhs.uk](http://www.nhschoices.nhs.uk) and type 'find a dentist' into the search box.