

Bottles and cups

What children drink from can impact their oral health. You should only give babies bottles of breast milk, formula milk, or boiled water that has been cooled down. From 6 months old, you can offer babies drinks in open-top cups. These are cups with no lids, which spill if knocked over. These cups can help children develop their sipping skills. This strengthens their face muscles, which helps them to bite, chew and talk.

When introducing open-top cups, start with smaller cups or those with handles. These are easier for babies to grip. Offer a small amount of water at first, and gradually increase this over time. You may need to show babies how to use the cup and help them to hold it at first. Some babies may need to use a cup or beaker with a spout before they can use an open-top cup. If this is the case, you should make sure that the spout does not have a valve, that drinks can freely flow through it, and that babies do not need to suck.

From 12 months old onwards, you should encourage children to have all drinks in open-top cups. From this point, avoid any bottles or cups that need children to suck, like those with soft teats or valves.

Brush your child's teeth

As soon as a child's teeth start to come through, they are ready for tooth brushing to start.

- Use a fluoride toothpaste containing 1000 parts per million (ppm)
- Use a smear of toothpaste for children under 3, and a pea sized amount for children 3 to 6
- Brush in circles for around 2 minutes, covering each tooth
- Brush twice a day, including before bed
- Children should spit, not rinse, after brushing
- Adults should help children brush their teeth until they are 7 years old to make sure they are brushing properly



(Source: Oral health—Help for early years providers—GOV.UK)



A guide to support parents with looking after your child's oral health

Oral health in the early years is essential to protecting young teeth and establishing good habits. Good oral health habits need to be formed from an early age to keep children from developing tooth decay. A child's early experiences with oral health can impact them for the rest of their life.



11% of 3 year olds in England have visible tooth decay.

Nearly a quarter of 5 year olds in England have tooth decay.

(Source: Disparities oral health survey 2022 and Public Health England oral health survey 2020)

Why is it important to have good oral health habits?

Oral health is important, even with baby teeth. This is because children's baby teeth:

- Help to bite and chew
- Support speech and language development
- Help them feel confident when they smile
- Make space for and help to guide adult teeth

Good oral health also keeps children free from toothache, infection and swollen gums.

Tooth decay

Children need to form good oral health habits from an early age **to help avoid tooth decay**. Tooth decay happens when sugars from food and drinks interact with bacteria in tooth plaque. This results in acid production, causing holes in teeth known as cavities.

If a child has tooth decay their teeth may have yellow, brown or black marks on them.



How can I look after my child's oral health

Cut down on free sugars.

Free sugars include all sugar added to food and drinks by the manufacturer, cook or consumer. They are found in foods like:

- Cakes, biscuits and chocolates
- Processed foods—like some jarred sauces, jams and breakfast cereals
- Some flavoured yoghurts

They are also found in natural products like:

- Honey and syrups
- Fruit juices and purees
- Smoothies

Free sugars are not found in:

- Whole fruit and vegetables
- Plain, unflavoured milk and yoghurt
- Water

Water and milk are the only safe drinks to give children in regard to their oral health.

As well as limiting the amount of free sugars children eat or drink, you should also make sure that they only have food or drinks that contain sugar at mealtimes. This is because, the more often their teeth come into contact with sugar, the more likely they will be to get tooth decay. Children should avoid food and drinks containing free sugars before bedtime and overnight.

