



AUSTRALIAN DENTAL
ASSOCIATION

How To Brush Your baby's or toddler's teeth

Babies

The concept of brushing your baby's teeth might seem odd. He or she might only have a few teeth or maybe none at all! However, no matter how many teeth you have and even in the early stages of life, bacteria will find a way into the mouth and can cause decay.

Teething usually starts between 4 and 7 months. Even before you see any teeth it's best to clean your baby's mouth by wiping the gums with a soft cloth twice a day. This will help remove bacteria and get both you and your baby used to 'teeth' cleaning.

As soon as the first tooth comes through it's time for brushing. The easiest way to do this is to place your baby in a secure position such as in your lap, on a bed, or on a change table. Support the head from behind by gently wrapping an arm around and cupping the chin, while gently opening the mouth. Using a soft children's toothbrush, gently brush each tooth and massage the gum using a soft, circular motion. You won't need any toothpaste until about 18 months so just use a bit of cold water.

It may seem over-the-top, but baby teeth need to be flossed daily. If you're not flossing you are only cleaning half of the mouth and increasing the risk of decay. Gently floss along the sides of each tooth up to the gum, holding the chin for best control of the head. If you're not confident flossing your baby's teeth speak to a dentist who can show you the correct technique.

Crying and Fussing

You might get a bit of resistance but it is important to brush and floss even if your baby doesn't like it. Be strong and ignore the tears and the squeals, but don't be too rough. Just remind yourself, you are maintaining a healthy mouth for a healthy child.

Toddlers

Brushing through the terrible two's...and beyond

For some parents brushing and flossing their toddlers teeth is like going to war twice a day. Running, kicking, screaming, crying. The simple fact is, most kids do not want you anywhere near their mouth. Sometimes it might not even seem worth the hassle, until you are aware of the alternative.

A combination of poor diet, not brushing, not flossing, and avoiding the dentist will undoubtedly mean your child will experience severe decay. This means pain, brown or yellow teeth, bad breath, and lifelong problems. In extreme cases, children as young as two or three end up going to the hospital and being put under general anaesthetic to have all of their teeth removed. This can not only have social ramifications for your child, but is a potentially life threatening procedure.

Ignore the tears, don't give in to the tantrums, and adopt some simple tips to make brushing more fun.

5 TIPS TO STOP DECAY IN ITS TRACKS

1. **Make brushing a game:** You can invent and change the rules or create characters and a storyline, as long as your child becomes interested they'll more passively accept the clean.
2. **Lead by example:** Brush your teeth first to show that everyone does it and it's a part of life. This will help you remember to be diligent about your oral care too!
3. **Look for fun products that might help:** Funny toothbrush holders, 'singing' tooth brushes, toothpaste with their favourite TV character on it. Let your child choose their own tools! Just make sure it's a soft toothbrush and child friendly low fluoride toothpaste.
4. **Play a song during brushing:** This will help keep to time (2 minutes) and be a fun distraction. Search YouTube, The APP Store or Google Play for great tooth brushing songs and apps.
5. **Create a brushing chart:** Sign off your child's success both morning and night, and create a (non-food related) reward system.

The best way to ensure you're doing the right things is to make sure you book both yourself and your child in to see the dentist regularly. You will both get a thorough clean of your teeth and gums, and make sure you have healthy teeth for life.



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