

How to keep your teeth and gums healthy

Keeping your mouth healthy is very important. By looking after your teeth and gums you can avoid tooth decay and gum disease.

➤ What is tooth decay?

When you eat or drink something sugary, the bacteria in your mouth produce acid. This acid can make holes in your teeth (tooth decay)

➤ What is gum disease?

Gum disease is caused by bacteria that stick to your teeth when you do not clean them properly. Dentists call this layer of bacteria PLAQUE. If you leave plaque on your teeth, your gums will become red, swollen, sore and may bleed when you brush them. If gum disease is not treated the teeth will become loose and may eventually fall out.

➤ How should I keep my mouth healthy

- You should keep your teeth and gums clean. Good brushing is very important.
- You should avoid sugary foods and drinks between meals.
- You should cut down on fizzy and acidic drinks.

➤ How should I brush my teeth and gums?

- Brush your teeth for two minutes in the morning and for two minutes at bedtime.
- Use a toothpaste containing fluoride.
- Choose a toothbrush with a small head to help reach every part of your mouth.
- Brush every surface of every tooth.
- Make sure the bristles reach the part of the tooth where it joins the gum. This is where plaque collects.
- Move the toothbrush in small gentle circular or scrubbing movements
- Dental floss or inter-dental brushes may be helpful to clean in between your teeth. Your dentist or hygienist can show you how to use them properly.
- You can use disclosing tablets which contain harmless dye to stain plaque, making it easier to see for removal.

➤ Is an electric tooth brush better?

Using an electrical tooth brush can be fun, but it will only work well if you use it properly. It is not a magic wand. Use the type of brush that works best for you.

➤ Why should I avoid sugary foods and drinks between meals?

Every time you eat or drink something sugary, the bacteria in your mouth will produce acid. Acid attacks can last up to an hour after eating or drinking

The more often you eat or drink something sugary, the more likely you are to cause tooth decay. Try to cut down the number of times you have sugary foods or drinks by keeping these to meal times. Avoid sugary snacks like cakes, sweets and biscuits between meals. Avoid sugary drinks like fruit squashes, natural fruit juices and milk shakes between meals.

➤ Why are fizzy and acidic drinks bad for my teeth?

Fruit juices, sports drinks and fizzy drinks even sugar-free ones contain acids. These acids can dissolve the outer surface of the teeth (enamel). This is called erosion. The teeth become thinner and are more likely to chip. They may also become sensitive.

➤ What about acidic foods?

Fruits such as oranges and lemons also contain acids, which can dissolve your teeth if you eat a large amount every day.

➤ What can I drink between meals?

Plain still water and milk are best for your teeth

➤ What can I eat between meals

Sugar-free or low sugar foods are best. Suggestions include bread, cheese sandwiches, vegetables, nuts or fruit.

➤ What else can I do to keep my teeth healthy?

- Use dental floss or an interdental brush each day to remove plaque from between the teeth.
- Using a fluoride alcohol-free mouth rinse can help reduce plaque, strengthen teeth and freshen breath.
- Visit your dentist regularly to check that your teeth and gums are healthy
- Chewing sugar-free gum after meals reduces the risk of tooth decay.

➤ **Can smoking and drinking alcohol affect my teeth and gums?**

Smoking causes tooth staining, bad breath, gum disease, tooth loss and mouth cancer.

Some alcoholic drinks are acidic and very sugary, also some mixer drinks contain acid, so these drinks can cause tooth decay or erosion if they are consumed often in large amounts.

➤ **REMEMBER**

- Brush your teeth for two minutes at least twice a day
- Use a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste.
- Replace your toothbrush regularly
- Eat a balanced, healthy diet and cut down on fizzy and acidic drinks
- Avoid sugary foods and drinks between meals
- Visit your dentist regularly