



**Oxford Health**  
NHS Foundation Trust



Oxfordshire Community Dental Service

# Looking after teeth, gums and oral health

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# Good oral health

Good oral health is more than just having a lovely smile. Good oral health helps us to feel more confident at school, at work, in our careers, with our friends and in other social situations.

Good oral health has a huge impact on our general health, our physical wellbeing and our quality of life too.

Healthy teeth help us to:

Chew the foods that are valuable to our overall health.

Help us speak clearly.

Provide some shape to our faces.

# Poor oral health

Poor oral health and hygiene can lead to:

- ❗ Dental decay
- ❗ Gum disease
- ❗ Periodontal disease
- ❗ Tooth loss

Poor oral health has been linked to general health conditions such as:

- ❗ Diabetes
- ❗ Stroke
- ❗ Cardiovascular disease
- ❗ Premature birth

## What is tooth decay?

Tooth decay is when the sugars that are in our foods react with the bacteria that are always in our mouths to create an acid.

Over time, this acid attacks the outside of the teeth, wearing away the tooth, which leads to a hole in the tooth or teeth.

If the hole gets bigger and deeper, it causes pain and may lead to tooth loss.

## What is dental erosion?

Dental erosion is when acid wears away the enamel which is the outer part of our teeth.

This acid may come from acidic drinks and/or some medical conditions. Medical conditions may include acid reflux. Acidic drinks include those that are fizzy, fruit flavoured, fruit smoothies and fruit juices.

# How do I prevent tooth decay, tooth erosion and gum disease?

## Toothbrushing

Brush your teeth twice a day for two minutes. Brush before you go to sleep and one other time during the day.

Use a pea sized amount of fluoride toothpaste which contains at least 1,350ppm of fluoride.

For children under 3yrs use a smear of toothpaste with at least 1,000ppm of fluoride.

Brush all surfaces of your teeth including gums.

After brushing your teeth for two minutes, spit out any excess toothpaste. There is no need to rinse your mouth out as the fluoride will stay on your teeth and help to protect them.

If you are able to, use interdental brushes and floss to clean between your teeth to help keep your gums healthy.

If you find your gums do bleed a little, keep brushing and this should stop. If your gums are still bleeding after a week and/or you are concerned, please see your dentist.

A mouthwash is not necessary to use unless it has been recommended by your dentist.

A mouthwash is best used between meals when you are unable to clean your teeth; perhaps when you get home from school or work.

## Healthy diet

Try to eat a balanced diet with at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day and reduce how often you have sugary foods and drinks.

Reduce how often you have fizzy drinks or drinks containing pureed fruit/fruit juice.

Keep sugary foods and drinks to mealtimes.

Choose snacks and drinks that are kinder to teeth, such as:

- ✓ Water
- ✓ Milk
- ✓ Crackers
- ✓ Cheese
- ✓ Toast
- ✓ Nuts (if you or someone close to you are not allergic to them)
- ✓ Breadsticks

- ✓ Seeds
- ✓ Raw vegetables
- ✓ Plain popcorn

Ask someone to help you understand food labels so you can understand what foods may contain hidden sugars. For example, sugars in cakes or some processed foods.

Keep alcohol consumption to recommended levels.

## See your dentist

See your dentist every six months or as often as they recommend.

You can find a dentist by visiting [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk).

If you have any concerns about your teeth, gums or mouth please see your dentist, dental nurse or dental hygienist.

## What is gum and periodontal disease?

Gum disease is when your gums become red, swollen, sore and may sometimes bleed.

Gum disease may lead to bad breath, the gums coming away from the teeth and loose teeth.

Periodontal disease may affect all the tissues supporting the teeth. This may lead to tooth loss.

Gum disease and periodontal disease may occur when your oral health could be improved and/or you have an underlying condition that increases your risk. For example, smoking, diabetes, pregnancy.

For more information, please see [www.dentalhealth.org/gum-disease](http://www.dentalhealth.org/gum-disease)

## Oral health care

Children will need help to brush their teeth until they are 7 years old.

Someone who has had a stroke or has another physical condition that may affect their dexterity may need help to brush their teeth.

If you have partial/full dentures they will need cleaning with soap and soaking in denture cleaner every day. Toothpaste may scratch your dentures.

Remove your dentures at night unless you have been asked to keep them in.



# Keeping your teeth healthy



Brush your teeth twice a day, once before bed and at one other time.



Brush for 2 minutes using a family fluoride toothpaste. Spit don't rinse.



Use:

- 1350ppm-1500ppm fluoride toothpaste
- Dental floss and interdental brushes (which clean in between your teeth).



Interdental Brushes



Electric toothbrush

An electric toothbrush may make toothbrushing easier.



Visit your dentist regularly, as often as recommended. If you have any questions, ask your dentist.

# Food and drink for healthy teeth



Water



Milk

Drinks without sugar like milk or water help protect your teeth.



Vegetables



Nuts



Cheese

Savoury foods like vegetables, nuts and cheese are good for your teeth.



What you eat and drink between meals can cause holes in your teeth. Choose savoury snacks or whole fruit.



Reduce how often you have sugary foods/drinks. Try to keep them to mealtimes only.



Watch out for hidden sugars found in fruit juices, smoothies and sauces.

# Advice for you from your dental professional

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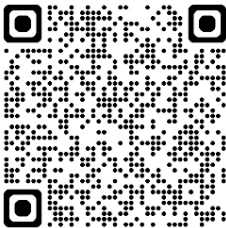
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Use this **QR code** to find all Oxfordshire Community Dental Service leaflets. You can also access them in an accessible format.



# Accessibility

An accessible version of this leaflet can be found on our website: [www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/cds](http://www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/cds)

If you need the information in another language or format, please contact us.

## Get in touch

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## Feedback

Our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) provides advice and support to patients, families, and carers, helping to resolve any problems, concerns, or complaints you may have.

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