

Toothbrushing - start it young

You should begin cleaning your child's teeth as soon as they come through. You can wipe your baby's teeth with a damp face washer or gauze.

You can start to teach your child to use a toothbrush when they are about 18 months old. This will encourage a habit of regular brushing and also make sure that your child's mouth is cleaned daily. You will need to help your child brush until they are old enough to do it properly by themselves, usually around the age of six to seven years.

Teaching your child to brush their teeth

Your child's teeth should be brushed twice each day – after breakfast and before going to bed at night.

Start by brushing your child's teeth for them.

- Place the child in a position so that they feel secure.
- Sit your child on your lap, facing away from you.
- Cup their chin with one hand, with their head resting against your body.
- Clean their teeth as you would your own, brushing the tooth and gum line.

Children should be encouraged to brush their own teeth as they get older but you will need to help them for several years until you are sure they can do it themselves.

The right toothbrush & toothpaste

Choose a toothbrush that is designed for children. It should have a small head and soft bristles.

Your child should use a children's low-dose fluoride toothpaste from 18 months to six years of age, unless specified by an oral health professional. Children who do not drink fluoridated water or who are at high risk of developing dental decay may need to vary the type of toothpaste used based on dental professional advice.

How to brush

- Smear a pea size amount over the toothbrush.
- Always brush in a circular motion, cleaning a few teeth at a time.
- Be sure to brush the gums along the gum line and to clean all tooth surfaces.
- It is best to spit out toothpaste rather than swallow it. This can be difficult for small children, you will need to encourage and show them how to do it.

Tips to encourage toothbrushing

Not all children will enjoy brushing their teeth at first. Here are some tips to encourage tooth brushing:

- Make it fun.
- Keep it quick.
- Children like to imitate others, so let them brush with other family members who can help them.
- If your child objects to the taste of toothpaste, try brushing without toothpaste. Introduce a children's low dose fluoride toothpaste when the child accepts the taste.

- If you are not having any success in the bathroom, try the kitchen.
- Give younger children a toothbrush as a toy.
- Use a reward system to encourage older children. For example, mark the number of times their teeth are cleaned each week on the calendar and offer rewards for achievements.

Where to get help

- Your dentist or oral health professional
- Your Maternal & Child Health Nurse
- Your doctor
- Your public oral health service
- Community dental clinic Tel. 1300 360 054
- The Royal Dental Hospital Melbourne,
 - General dental enquiries Tel. (03) 9341 1000 or 1800 833 039 (from rural Victoria) Monday to Friday, 8:30am to 5pm.
 - Emergency Service Tel. 1300 360 054 Monday to Friday 8.30am to 9.15pm, weekends and public holidays 9am to 9.15pm

All children who are 12 years and under are eligible for priority public oral health services. Children receive general oral health advice as well as dental check-ups and treatment. For eligibility information, Dental Health Services Victoria, Tel.1300 360 054

Things to remember

- Eighteen months of age is the ideal time to start brushing.
- Brush teeth and along the gumline twice a day with a soft brush.
- You will need to help your child brush their teeth.
- Use children's low dose fluoride toothpaste until the age of six unless specified by your oral health professional.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Dental Health Services Victoria

Content on this website is provided for education and information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not imply endorsement and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. Content has been prepared for Victorian residents and wider Australian audiences, and was accurate at the time of publication. Readers should note that, over time, currency and completeness of the information may change. All users are urged to always seek advice from a registered health care professional for diagnosis and answers to their medical questions.

For the latest updates and more information, visit www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Copyright © 1999/2012 State of Victoria. Reproduced from the Better Health Channel (www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au) at no cost with permission of the Victorian Minister for Health. Unauthorised reproduction and other uses comprised in the copyright are prohibited without permission.