Dental care - fluoride

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Fluoride helps protect everyone’s teeth from decay.
Use the correct fluoride toothpaste for children.

Fluoride is a mineral found in food, water, plants and toothpaste. Brushing with fluoride toothpaste and drinking fluoridated water helps to protect teeth against decay. Water fluoridation is recommended by leading national and international health organisations.

Fluoride is a natural substance
Fluoride is not a medication. It is a mineral found naturally in rock, air, soil, plants and water. All fresh and sea water contains some fluoride. Many foods and drinks naturally contain fluoride. It is also added to:
- Drinking water, where fluoride is added to the local water supply
- Fluoride toothpastes, gels and mouth rinses
- Fluoride products painted on the teeth by a dental professional.

Water fluoridation helps protect teeth against decay
Tooth decay occurs when acid attacks the surface of the tooth. Fluoride helps repair any damage before it becomes serious. A constant low-level supply of fluoride is best for this. Fluoride in your drinking water is like a constant ‘repair kit’ for your teeth.
Dental decay affects the community in many ways, including pain, suffering and cost.

Benefits of water fluoridation
Fluoride is helpful because it:
- Helps protect against tooth decay in children and adults
- Repairs weak spots that could become cavities (holes in teeth) on the surface of the tooth
- Reduces the amount of money people need to spend on dental treatment
- Saves the community money and time (away from work and school)
- Reduces discomfort and pain caused by tooth decay
- Provides a benefit to all people, especially individuals from low socioeconomic communities, who have less access to other forms of fluoride treatments.

Adult and baby teeth need protection from decay
Fluoride can help to protect young and old teeth because it:
- Helps protect against surface decay in older adults
- Helps protect against tooth decay in children
- Helps prevent early loss of baby teeth due to decay. Baby teeth are important because they help to guide the adult teeth developing underneath into the right place. Losing baby teeth early may result in the need for orthodontic treatment
- Helps prevent painful and costly dental complications like tooth abscess or other permanent tooth damage.

Other ways to help protect your teeth
Even if your water is fluoridated, it is important that you look after your teeth by:
- Eating a healthy diet
- Brushing and flossing your teeth regularly
- Having regular dental check-ups
- Using a toothpaste with fluoride in it.

Protecting your children’s teeth
Children’s teeth need particular protection as they develop. Suggestions include:
- Brushing teeth without toothpaste until the age of 18 months
- Introducing a low-fluoride toothpaste when a child is approximately 18 months old. Choose a low-fluoride toothpaste designed especially for children
- Using a child-size toothbrush with soft bristles
• Using only a pea-size amount of toothpaste, smeared over the toothbrush
• Encouraging children to spit out toothpaste, not swallow it. Don’t rinse
• Supervising children when they brush their teeth until you are sure they can do it well
• Continuing to use low fluoride toothpaste for children until they are six years old
• Don’t use fluoride supplements in the form of drops or tablets to be chewed or swallowed. They can affect the development of your child’s adult teeth.

If your drinking water is not fluoridated, seek professional dental advice about the use of fluoride toothpaste for children. A dental professional may advise more frequent use of fluoride toothpaste, commencement of toothpaste at a younger age or earlier commencement of use of standard toothpaste.

Dental fluorosis

Too much fluoride at an early age can cause a child’s adult teeth (which form underneath their baby teeth) to stain. This is called dental fluorosis. Dental fluorosis looks like fine, pearly-white mottling, flecking or lines on the surface of the teeth; it is usually very hard to see. It cannot develop after teeth are fully formed and does not affect the function of the teeth. Dental fluorosis can occur in areas with or without water fluoridation.

If fluoride is not the cause of staining of the teeth, it is not called dental fluorosis. Mottling of the teeth may be caused by other things including

• Injury to the teeth
• Certain medications
• Childhood infections.

Water quality and fluoride

Water fluoridation does not noticeably change your water. Some facts about fluoride and the quality of your water are:

• Adding fluoride to the water does not change the taste or smell of your drinking water, as fluoride has no taste or smell.
• Your local water authority will be able to tell you if your supply has fluoride added to it.
• All Australian capital cities have fluoride added to the water.
• Boiling the water does not significantly change the levels of fluoride added.
• Most home water filters do not remove fluoride, with the exception of reverse osmosis systems.

Safety and water fluoridation

Water fluoridation is supported by leading Australian and international health, medical and dental organisations due to the following:

• The latest evidence confirms that water fluoridation is a safe and effective way to help protect teeth against decay.
• There is no evidence that fluoride in water fluoridation programs affects bone development or causes hip fractures or cancer.
• Fluoride is added to water in carefully controlled amounts. The total amount of fluoride in the water is monitored on a regular basis.
• Only very small amounts are used.

Water fluoridation is recommended

Many leading local, national and international health organisations endorse water fluoridation, including:

• Arthritis Australia
• Australia’s National Health and Medical Research Council
• Australian Dental Association
• Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
• Australian Medical Association
• Cancer Council Victoria
• Diabetes Victoria
• FDI World Dental Federation
• Osteoporosis Australia
• Public Health Association of Australia
• The Pharmacy Guild of Australia
• World Health Organization

Where to get help

• Water Fluoridation Information Line, Department of Health Tel. 1800 651 723
• Your dental professional
• Your local water authority

Things to remember

• Fluoride helps protect everyone’s teeth from decay.
• Use the correct fluoride toothpaste for children.

References


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More information

Mouth and teeth

The following content is displayed as Tabs. Once you have activated a link navigate to the end of the list to view its associated content. The activated link is defined as Active Tab

- Mouth and teeth basics
- Mouth conditions
- Dental care for children
- Dental care
- Dental procedures

Mouth and teeth basics

- **Calcium**
  If you don’t have enough calcium in your diet, your bones will eventually become weak and brittle...

- **Mouth**
  The mouth helps us to digest our food and communicate through speech...

- **Teeth**
  Teeth have different shapes that reflect the different jobs they do in helping us eat and digest food...

- **Tongue**
  There are about 9000 taste buds on the average adult tongue...

Mouth conditions

- **Cleft palate and cleft lip**
  Most cleft palates and cleft lips can be repaired so that appearance and speech develop normally...

- **Cold sores**
  Cold sores are blisters around the mouth and nose, caused by the herpes simplex virus...

- **Dental injuries – knocked out teeth**
  A knocked out permanent tooth can survive if it is immediately put back. Do not put a knocked-out baby tooth back...

- **Dry mouth syndrome**
  A dry mouth is a symptom of an underlying problem, rather than a disease in itself...

- **Gum disease**
  Brushing teeth regularly helps to prevent gum disease and early treatment can help save affected teeth...

- **Halitosis or bad breath**
  Having halitosis or bad breath can have a major impact on a person...

- **Mouth cancer**
  Smoking increases the risk of mouth cancer six-fold...

- **Teeth – gapped teeth**
  In many cases, a gap between the upper front teeth will close by itself...

- **Teeth grinding**
  Teeth grinding (bruxism) is involuntary clenching or grinding of the teeth, usually during sleep...

- **Tongue-tie**
  Tongue-tie is a condition caused by restrictive tongue tissue that stops the tongue from poking out past the lips...

Dental care for children

- **Dental care - fluoride**
Fluoride in your drinking water is like a constant 'repair kit' for your teeth...

- **Dental checks for young children**
  Children should have an oral health check by the time they turn two...

- **Dental injuries - knocked out teeth**
  A knocked out permanent tooth can survive if it is immediately put back. Do not put a knocked-out baby tooth back...

- **Dummies**
  Dummy sucking should stop before school age to avoid teeth or mouth problems...

- **Oral conditions - young children**
  Oral thrush, mouth ulcers and cold sores are common oral conditions in babies and young children...

- **Recent arrivals, asylum seekers and family support services**
  Provides an overview of family support programs and health services available to refugees and asylum seekers living in Victoria...

- **Seeing a dentist or dental health practitioner**
  There are a range of dental services available to assist you with any dental health problems you or your family may have...

- **Teeth development in children**
  Teething symptoms are common in children and can be managed without medications...

- **Thumb and finger sucking**
  Finger or thumb sucking should stop before school age to avoid mouth problems...

- **Toothbrushing - children**
  Start cleaning your baby's teeth as soon as the first tooth comes through to help prevent tooth decay...

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**Dental care**

- **Tooth care**
  Tooth decay can be prevented with a good diet, regular tooth brushing and dental check-ups...

- **10 tips on how to eat more calcium**
  Reduce your intake of coffee, alcohol and soft drinks... 10 tips on how to eat more calcium...

- **10 tips to look after your teeth**
  See your dentist for regular check-ups ... 10 tips to look after your teeth...

- **Dental erosion**
  Visit your dentist regularly so tooth erosion is detected early, helping prevent further tooth surface loss...

- **Dental injuries - knocked out teeth**
  A knocked out permanent tooth can survive if it is immediately put back. Do not put a knocked-out baby tooth back...

- **Dentures**
  It is important to look after your dentures and your gums to keep your mouth healthy...

- **Gum disease**
  Brushing teeth regularly helps to prevent gum disease and early treatment can help save affected teeth...

- **Mouthguards**
  A mouthguard provides the best protection for the teeth, lips and jaw during sport and leisure activities...

- **Pregnancy and teeth**
  It's important to look after your teeth and gums when you're pregnant, as gum disease can affect your baby...

- **Recent arrivals, asylum seekers and family support services**
  Provides an overview of family support programs and health services available to refugees and asylum seekers living in Victoria...

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**Dental procedures**

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- Cosmetic dentistry
  Discoloured, chipped or missing teeth can affect self-confidence but cosmetic dentistry techniques can help.

- Dental anxiety and phobias
  Dental anxiety is common, but there are ways to help you manage it. Talk to your dentist about which strategies are right for you.

- Dental fillings
  Dental fillings are used to repair worn, decayed or damaged teeth.

- Dental injuries - knocked out teeth
  A knocked out permanent tooth can survive if it is immediately put back. Do not put a knocked-out baby tooth back.

- Dental sealants
  A dental sealant is a coating applied to the permanent back teeth to prevent tooth decay.

- Dental treatment
  Modern techniques mean that dental and oral health treatment is almost always painless.

- Orthodontic treatment
  Orthodontics involves the use of a range of corrective devices, such as braces and plates, to encourage the teeth to align properly.

- Root canal treatment
  Root canal treatment is a dental procedure to replace a tooth's damaged or dead pulp with synthetic filling.

- Wisdom teeth
  Wisdom teeth that may cause problems are best taken out sooner rather than later.

Related Information

- Toothbrushing - children
  Start cleaning your baby's teeth as soon as the first tooth comes through to help prevent tooth decay.

- Dummies
  Dummy sucking should stop before school age to avoid teeth or mouth problems.

- Thumb and finger sucking
  Finger or thumb sucking should stop before school age to avoid mouth problems.

- Teeth development in children
  Teething symptoms are common in children and can be managed without medications.

- Oral conditions - young children
  Oral thrush, mouth ulcers and cold sores are common oral conditions in babies and young children.

Home

Related information on other websites

- Australian Dental Association - Fluoride & your dental health.
- Australian Dental Association, (Victorian Branch).

Content Partner

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