



TEETH AND CHILDREN

Caries (tooth decay) is extremely common in the UK. It is perhaps the most common disease of children. It is caused by bacteria (germs) acting on certain foods in the mouth. The combination of bacteria and food causes acids to form which can slowly dissolve the teeth. If this happens, a filling may be needed (or if left untreated the tooth may decay and need to be removed). Sweet foods are the worst offenders. Caries is an avoidable disease that can often be prevented and the following will help with this:

Brushing teeth . This should be done at least twice a day. It should start with the first tooth in infancy so that a habit is formed. Many children don't like their teeth being brushed at first. However, it is possible to make it into a game when first started. Do persist as it is very important to develop this habit. By the age of 3 or 4 children can often clean their own teeth (under supervision). Parents, don't forget your own teeth and set the example for children to follow. A fluoride toothpaste is recommended.

Foods . As far as possible, limit sweets and sugary foods between meals. The worst things are lollipops and sugary drinks which coat the teeth for long periods. If sweets are given it may be better to eat them all at once as a snack rather than spread them over several hours. Try fruit or raw vegetables as snacks instead. Sugar free medicines, if available, are also preferable when medicines are needed.

Fluoride. Fluoride is a chemical that is found naturally in water in very low concentrations and is known to help protect teeth against caries. Some areas have fluoride added to the water supply. This has dramatically reduced tooth decay in those areas. It is worth finding out (your dentist will know) if your area is a fluoride area. If not, fluoride drops can be taken - your dentist will advise. Using a fluoride toothpaste is also recommended.

Dental checks . From an early age it is worth getting a child used to dental check ups. A check up every 6-12 months is advisable. In some areas, particularly where there is no fluoride in the water supply, a protective sealant can be placed in the crevices at the back of the teeth by a dentist. This helps protect the teeth from caries and tooth decay. It is 6-7 year olds who may benefit most. A dentist will advise about this.

[Return to top](#)