



The Basics of Good Oral Hygiene

This sheet will give you an overview of the important points about good oral care to keep in mind when you're talking to children, adults and parents. Most of the information applies to all three groups

For Adults

We could go into all the statistics about age, sex, geographic location, income and education but the plain fact is that many adults aren't familiar with the correct way to clean their teeth or what damage their diet is doing.

The Step-By-Step Guides for adults explain the 'do's and don'ts' of eating, brushing, flossing and other lifestyle activities.

Brushing - How long and how often?

Teeth should be brushed twice a day for two minutes and flossed once a day. A lot of people rush their brushing (the average time spent being around 45 seconds) or skip it entirely.

Correct technique

Many people scrub too hard on the tooth and gum surfaces which actually causes more problems and doesn't always get food out from between the teeth and round the gum line. People also forget to brush their tongue where a lot of bacteria can build up.

Eating habits

Each time we eat, the sugars in our food and drink are broken down by the bacteria in our mouths to form acid which immediately starts attacking our teeth. Half an hour after eating is when our teeth are at their weakest and most vulnerable (and, actually, brushing during that first half hour makes things worse so we need to wait if we want to brush after a meal).

If we don't eat anything else then our saliva goes to work to neutralise these acids and protect our teeth during the day until our next meal. But, if we continue to snack throughout the day, particularly on sweet foods and fizzy drinks, we're constantly topping up the sugars that turn into acid so our teeth are under constant attack and saliva just can't cope with that level of acid. Our teeth will start to erode and decay.

The bottom line on eating habits is to eat fewer sugary foods and drinks and don't snack between meals.

For Children

The same basics of brushing, flossing and eating (mentioned above) apply in the same way to children as they do to adults. Whereas adults are more likely to have experienced the pain and inconvenience bad teeth can cause, children will be a little more 'indestructible'. They need to understand not just how to look after their teeth but why it's so important.

While most children will be practicing brushing at night with their parents, you will be able to walk them through the basic techniques (using the How to Brush guide for children) and also explain the most important point about diet and eating habits.

Diet

This is a harder issue to tackle but is such an important factor in good oral health that any improvements that can be made are worth it. The same problems that are caused by bad adult diets apply to children. The difference is that children's teeth are not as strong and resistant as adult teeth and most tooth decay has already happened by age six. After that it either carries on getting worse or it gets treated. We have the chance to stop it from happening in the first place by teaching good oral hygiene and eating habits (see the Healthy Eating and Drinking Guide), which will be their best defence against painful tooth decay.

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Professional Resources

For more information on oral health and looking after your mouth, visit www.dentalhealthweek.com.au

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LET'S STOP THE ROT
Join The Fight Against **Tooth Decay**



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For Parents

Most parents are aware that kids need to clean their teeth but many aren't sure what they've got to do in order to help their children to do it properly.

Baby Teeth

Just because baby teeth fall out and are replaced with permanent teeth, it doesn't mean that they don't matter. They actually play a big role in the development of permanent teeth and baby tooth decay can affect that development. There's a Step-By-Step Guide you can give to parents to help them look after their baby's first teeth.

Supervision

Up until age six parents should be brushing their child's teeth for them as children won't necessarily have the dexterity and coordination to do it themselves. After six children can be introduced to the right way to brush and floss but they will still need supervising while they get used to the time it takes and the right techniques. Just telling kids to brush their teeth often doesn't mean that teeth actually get brushed!

Many children don't like brushing so it's good to have a few tricks to make brushing more fun and keep them interested while they're learning. The 'Teaching Your Child to Clean Their Teeth Properly' guide covers this. It describes some simple tips and tricks to help educate children about the right way to clean their teeth.

Dental Check-ups

A child's first dental visit should happen shortly after they get their first tooth or around 12 months of age. After that parents should aim to have regular yearly check-ups so the dentist can spot any problems early. We know that this is not always possible which is why it's even more important to get kids looking after their teeth properly.

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