

EAST AYRSHIRE

**Health & Social Care**  
Partnership



**NHS**  
Ayrshire  
& Arran

# General oral health advice

Information for you



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## **Steps for good oral health:**

- Keep sugary snacks and drinks to mealtimes
- Brush teeth twice a day using 1450ppm fluoride toothpaste
- Visit the dentist regularly

## **Why are teeth important?**

- To chew and digest food
- To talk and pronounce words clearly
- To give our face shape
- For appearance

## **Plaque**

Plaque is bacteria which constantly forms in the mouth. If it is not removed it can cause problems with your teeth and gums. Plaque is a sticky substance which will only be removed by effective toothbrushing and cleaning between teeth.

## **Decay**

When we eat food or have drinks containing sugars, the sugar reacts with plaque and forms acid.

Frequent acid attacks can result in a hole or cavity forming in the tooth.

Tooth decay cannot be reversed.

At this stage your dentist can treat the decay, however if it is not treated it can lead to tooth loss.

## **Gum disease**

Gum disease is swelling, soreness or infection of the gum tissue. Gum disease can affect anyone of any age though some groups are more at risk, such as pregnant women, due to hormonal changes.

**For more information see the ‘Dental care: During pregnancy and for new mums’ leaflet.**

When plaque is not removed it attacks the gums and makes them red, puffy and often bleed, gingivitis is the first stage and is reversible by following an effective oral hygiene routine. As this progresses, the supporting structures break down and can eventually result in tooth loss. This advanced stage is called periodontitis.

## **Smoking**

Smoking cigarettes can cause tooth staining, bad breath, lead to gum disease and tooth loss and more seriously mouth cancer.

**For more info see ‘Oral health and smoking’ leaflet.**

## **Diet**

A varied healthy diet is important for general health and vital for good oral health. Sugary snacks should be limited to mealtimes only and in between meals try eating:

- **Fresh fruit**
- **Breadsticks**
- **Rice cakes**

- **Bagels**
- **Crumpet, pancake or plain scone with a little margarine or low fat spread**
- **Vegetable sticks**
- **Plain popcorn**

Another helpful hint is to chew sugar free gum for around 20 minutes after meals – this stimulates saliva flow which naturally cleanses the mouth and reduces the acid levels.

## **Drinks**

Plain water and plain milk are the safest drinks for teeth.

Fruit juices are a good source of vitamins and minerals, but safer for teeth if you keep them to mealtimes. This is due to the acidic content which can contribute to dental erosion, which is the wearing away of the surface of the tooth.

All fizzy drinks are acidic and cause damage to teeth. Although diet drinks don't contain sugar they contain acid and will still cause dental erosion. Remember if you add sugar to tea or coffee this will also damage your teeth.

## **Toothbrushing**

Brush teeth and gums twice a day with a pea sized amount of 1450 ppm fluoride toothpaste, unless advised otherwise by your dentist. Use a small headed toothbrush with medium bristles. Brush for two minutes in the morning after breakfast and at night before bed. Use a dry toothbrush as the bristles are firmer when dry and clean more effectively. Spit out toothpaste but don't rinse with water, this allows

the fluoride in your toothpaste to be absorbed by your teeth and help strengthen enamel. Only use alcohol free fluoride mouthwash (unless instructed by your dentist) and use at a different time from brushing. Use interdental aids (such as floss) once a day to help remove bits of food and plaque from between your teeth.



## **Dental visits**

You should visit the dentist regularly and they will advise how often your check up should take place.

If you wear dentures you should also visit the dentist regularly for an oral examination and to check that your dentures fit properly.

NHS dental examination is free.

## **As you get older...**

With good oral hygiene and care from professionals it is possible to keep your natural teeth for life.

As we age our gums may recede and teeth may become more sensitive as a result.

You may need to take extra care when carrying out oral hygiene, such as:

- **using a toothpaste for sensitive teeth with 1450ppm fluoride;**
- **using a small headed toothbrush with medium bristles;**
- **using an electric toothbrush;**
- **mouthwash as recommended by a dentist; and**
- **using a toothbrush handle adaptor - this may be helpful if you struggle using a toothbrush.**

Some regular medications may contribute to conditions in the mouth, in particular dry mouth (Xerostomia).

Saliva helps to protect your teeth against decay, so when less saliva is produced you may be at risk and should therefore contact your dentist for advice.

Symptoms of dry mouth can also be eased by frequent sips of iced water or use of an artificial saliva spray.



**If you have any concerns please contact your own dentist first**

or

the **Dental Advice Line** for urgent care or advice on weekdays, 8.30am to 6pm 01292 616990

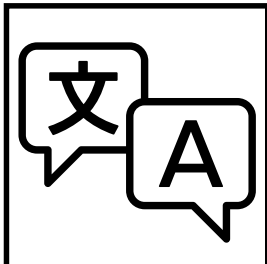
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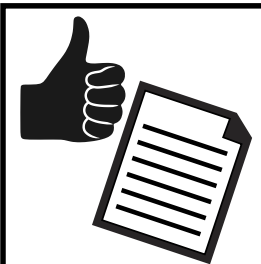
A list of dentists who are available for patients to access can be found on our NHS Public Website or Dental App – see front of page of this leaflet for details

For other oral health leaflets visit our website:  
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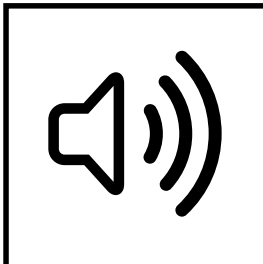
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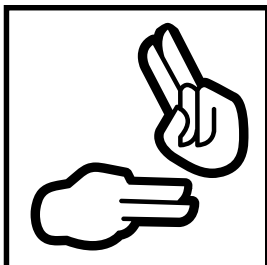
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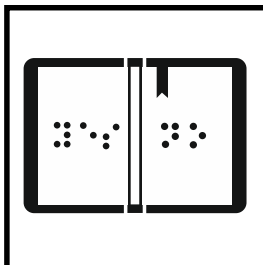
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