

## Children's Speech and Language Therapy Mouth Care Advice

### Why is mouth care important?

Keeping your child's mouth and teeth clean is important for their health. Poor mouth care can increase the risk of chest infections and illness. It is important to keep your child's mouth healthy, even if they do not eat and drink.

A healthy mouth:

- is clean and moist with saliva.
- has gums, tongue and cheeks that are pink.
- has no tooth decay.
- has no red or white patches on the gums, tongue and/or cheeks.

### Who could have difficulties with mouth care?

Some children are more at risk of developing problems with their mouths:

- Children with a learning disability or developmental delay.
  - They may not understand why we clean our teeth.
  - They may not let people help them with mouth care.
- Children with some medical conditions.
  - Some conditions are more likely to cause a dry mouth, ulcers or gum problems.
- Children with physical disabilities.
  - They might find it harder to open their mouth for a toothbrush, hold a toothbrush, or to get to a sink.
- Children with difficulties swallowing.
  - They may have difficulties getting rid of saliva and food from their mouth.
  - They may have less saliva.
  - They are more at risk of oral thrush.
  - They often need other people to help with mouth care.
  - Extra care is needed to reduce the risk of aspirating (swallowing it into the lungs) the toothpaste. We recommend a low foaming toothpaste.
  - Oral care reduces risk of pneumonia relating to aspiration.

This advice has been adapted from the 'Mini Mouth Matters' advice for hospitals written by Great Ormond Street Hospital.

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## Carrying Out Mouth Care

- If your child regularly has sore patches in and around the mouth, a dry mouth, or too much saliva – talk to your child’s doctor.
- Mouth swabs are not recommended for children with a dry mouth; they are a choking risk as the sponge can come off the stick.
- From 1 year old children need to see a dentist twice a year.
- Some children may dislike and refuse toothbrushing. You may need to complete the ‘touch on face’ routine first. See the ‘helping children with touch on face – pre feeding skills’ leaflet for advice.
- Offer regular mouth care twice a day.
- Have a routine. A visual timetable can help your child know what is happening. A reward activity for the end of the toothbrushing may motivate your child. This may be especially important for children with Autism.

## Lips and the skin around their mouth

Some children can get sores on their lips or chin. It can be more common if they drool.

- Clean your child’s face using water and a soft flannel. Do not use baby wipes, tissues, or soap as they may irritate your child’s skin.
- If your child drools, dab dry with a soft cloth instead of wiping. Wiping may make your child drool more.
- Using a barrier cream or lip salve may help keep skin and lips more comfortable – talk to your child’s doctor about this.

## Toothbrushing

### Finger toothbrushes

Finger toothbrushes can be helpful with young children and babies. They are made of soft silicone. They can be used to massage the gums and clean very first teeth.

Finger toothbrushes can be purchased from online shops and supermarkets.



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## Toothpaste

Flavourless toothpaste is available for children who are sensitive to strong flavours, for example children with Autism. These are easily available on the internet.

Check the ingredients of the toothpaste. Some may not be suitable if your child has allergies or a restricted diet.

### Brushing your child's teeth

- Use a child sized manual toothbrush with a small head and soft bristles and toothpaste.
- Squeeze a small amount of toothpaste onto the brush
  - For children aged 0-6 years – use a small smear of paste



- For children aged 7 years and older – use a pea-sized amount of paste



- Press the paste into the bristles.

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Follow this routine:

1. Have your child sitting up or standing.  
An upright position with toothbrushing is especially important for children with eating and drinking difficulties to reduce the risk of aspiration.
2. Touch your child's lips with their brush.
3. Begin to brush your child's teeth.
4. Start by brushing your child's front teeth. Then move onto the teeth at the side of the mouth if they allow this.
5. Use small circular or gentle back and forth motions.

Remember:

- Your child may need help to open their mouth. Use your thumb to gently press downwards on their chin. If they will not open their mouth, do not force the toothbrush in. Try again another time.
- Try to keep this routine relaxed and fun. Singing a song might help.
- Encourage your child to practise brushing their own teeth. This may help them to accept the brush from you afterwards.
- If your child bites down on the brush, do not pull it out the brush while they are still biting. Wait for them to relax.
- Do not offer any fluids after brushing to rinse their mouth.

Songs and Games to Try:

Games

[Sesame Street | Play Fun Games for Kids](#)

Songs

[Sesame Street: Healthy Teeth, Healthy Me: Brushy Brush PSA - YouTube](#)

[Sesame Street: Kids Just Love to Brush - YouTube](#)

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