

# Teeth for Life

You have so many good reasons to keep your and your family's teeth and gums healthy: sparkling smiles; speaking, socializing, eating and chewing for good [nutrition](#). Teeth also are the pillars that hold out the cheeks and make you look young. Another reason is to avoid [toothaches](#) and discomfort. And new research suggests that [gum disease](#) can lead to other problems in the body, including increased risk of [heart disease](#), copd, pneumonia, diabetes and low birth weight babies or early delivery..

## Life-long dental care begins while we are still babies

### The correct care begins at birth

Babies need to have their mouths cleaned daily even before they have a tooth. They also need to get used to having a soft cloth used to clean their mouth so that they are accustomed to this prior to the first baby tooth. Then brushing becomes very important. This builds a daily habit that will last a lifetime.

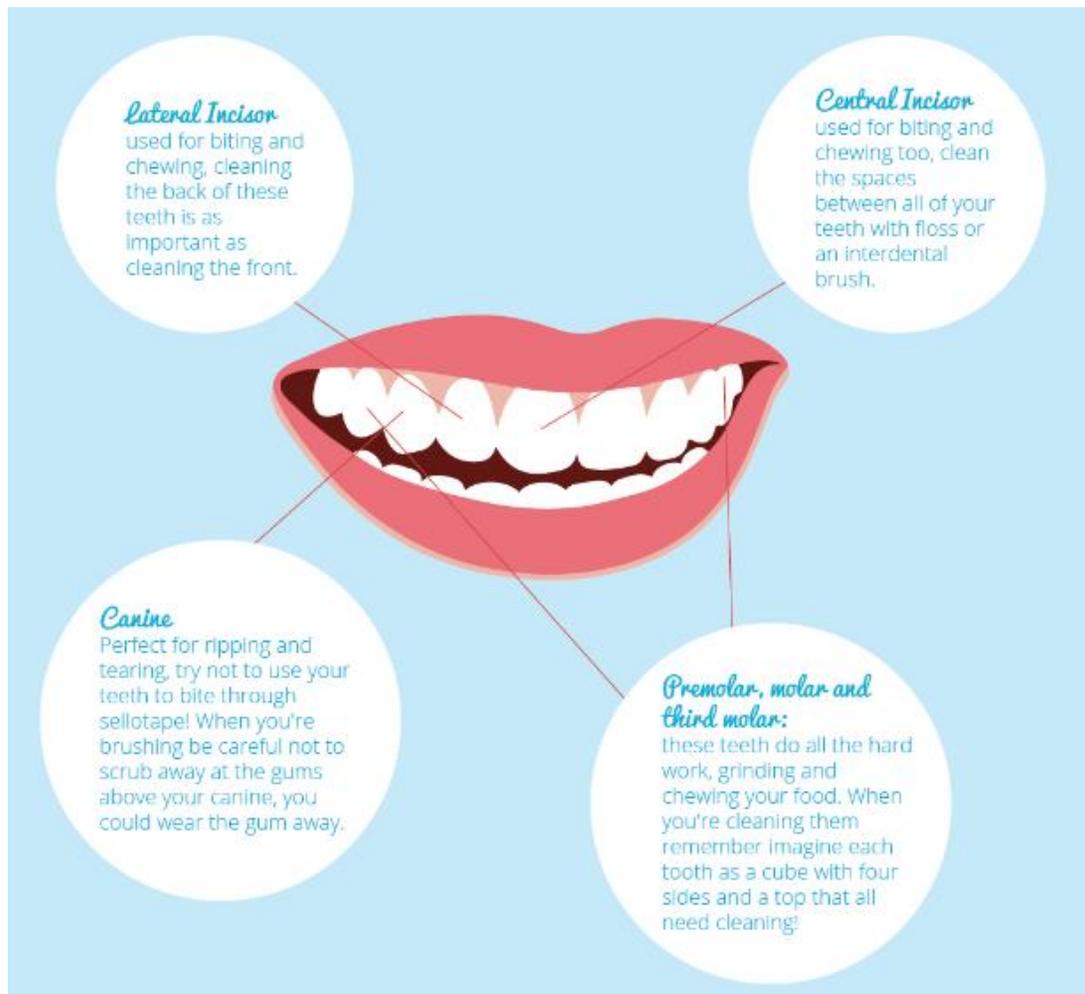
It may seem to you to be a bit of an exaggeration to be brushing baby teeth, but the truth is that the sooner the babies get used to it, the more natural it will seem to them later in life. Parents should remember that preventive checks are recommended from the age of one and baby teeth should be checked twice each year. You so also Lift The Lip (upper lip) regularly to check on discolouration or dry white patches on the babies teth a s early signs of Early Childhood Caries.

With the smallest babies, the first teeth are brushed with a special brush attached to a finger. Approximately at the age when the baby has 8 baby teeth (usually four at the top and four at the bottom), **roughly around 9 months of their life, the first real brush is used**. "It should have several qualities: it has to have the smallest brush head possible, the fibers should be cut straight and soft. Some brushes have protectors to make sure the parent does not accidently slide the brush into the baby's throat".

When children are in kindergarten, they learn to brush their teeth by themselves, ideally by imitating their parents, who show them how they brush their teeth. Toothpaste should not be used until the children learn to correctly spit it out, alternatively using toothpastes that do not include fluoride. **It is important to help**

**the children clean their teeth if necessary** – ensuring that they clean their teeth for **at least two minutes** – this applies to children prior to going to school, but also to small school children (further cleaning by parents is recommended until the age of eight or nine).

**We have 4 types of teeth. You need to learn how to look after all of them to keep your teeth for life**



Fortunately, there are simple ways to keep teeth strong and healthy from childhood to old age. Here's how:

**1. Start children early.** Despite great strides in decay prevention, one in four young children develops signs of [tooth](#) decay before they start school. Half of all children between the ages of 12 and 15 have cavities. “[Dental care](#) should begin at birth but must be started as soon as a child’s first [tooth](#) appears, usually around six months,”. “Teeth can be wiped with a clean, damp cloth or a very soft brush. At about age 2, you can let kids try brushing for themselves, but you still need to clean their teeth as their hand skills are very limited. Let the child start then you finish the cleaning. And of course it’s important to supervise.”

**2. Seal off trouble.** Permanent molars come in around age 6. Thin protective coatings applied to the chewing surfaces of the back teeth or molars can prevent decay in the pits and fissures. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, sealants can significantly reduce caries. Talk to your dental professional.

**3. Use enough -- but not too much -- fluoride.** The single biggest advance in [oral health](#) has been fluoride, which strengthens enamel, making it less likely to decay. Many [toothpastes](#) and [mouth](#) rinses also contain fluoride. Fluoride should be used sparingly in young children -- no more than a pea-sized dab on the toothbrush. Too much swallowed can cause white spots on teeth.

**4. Brush twice a day.** [Gum disease](#) and [tooth](#) decay remain big problems -- and not just for older people. Three-fourths of teenagers have gums that bleed.

Along with the basic advice, remember:

- [Toothbrushes](#) should be changed at least twice a year or more often if high pressure is used.. Your toothbrush will show you when it needs to be replaced.
- Teenagers with braces may need to use special toothbrushes and other oral hygiene tools to brush their teeth. Talk to [your dentist](#) or orthodontist.
- Older people with [arthritis](#) or other problems may have trouble holding a toothbrush or using floss. Some people find it easier to use an electric toothbrush.

**5. Rinse after meals.** In addition to brushing, rinsing your [mouth](#) with water can help prevent decay and [gum problems](#). If you chew gum, choose sugar free gum. Chewing sugar-free gum after a meal can also protect by increasing [saliva](#) flow, which naturally washes bacteria away and neutralizes acid. However chewing gum can result in arthritic damage to the jaw joint.

**6. Mouth Guards Block blows to teeth.** Sports and recreational activities build healthy bodies, but they can pose a threat to teeth. Most school teams now require children to wear [mouth](#) guards. But remember: unsupervised recreational activities like skateboarding and roller-blading can also result in injuries. Your dentist can make a custom-fitted **mouth guard**. Another option: buy a mouth guard at a sporting goods store that can be softened using hot water to form fit your mouth.

**7. Don't smoke or use smokeless tobacco.** Tobacco stains teeth and significantly increases the risk of gum disease and [oral cancer](#). If you smoke or use chewing tobacco, consider quitting. Counsel your kids not to start.

**8. Eat smart.** At every age, a healthy diet is essential to healthy teeth and gums. A well-[balanced diet](#) of whole foods -- including grains, nuts, [fruits and vegetables](#), and dairy products -- will provide all the [nutrients](#) you need. Some researchers believe that omega-3 fats, the kind found in fish, may also reduce inflammation, thereby lowering risk of gum disease.

**9. Avoid sugary foods.** When bacteria in the mouth break down simple sugars, they produce acids that can erode [tooth enamel](#), opening the door to decay. "Sugary drinks, including soft drinks and fruit drinks, pose a special threat because people tend to sip them, raising acid levels over a long period of time,". "Carbonated drinks may make matters worse, since carbonation also increases acidity." Sticky candies are another culprit, because they linger on teeth surfaces.

**Keep an eye out for "hidden sugar", you will even find it in "savoury" food**

Learn to read labels



**10. Make an appointment.** Have a dental check-up at least annually or based on need as determined with your dental provider. The old adage of every 6 months has no basis in science and was determined as part of an ad campaign by a toothpaste company. You will need to visit more often if you have problems like gum disease. During a routine exam, your dentist or dental hygienist removes plaque build-up that you can't brush or clean away and look for signs of decay.

A regular dental exam also checks for::

- **Early signs of oral cancer.** Nine out of 10 cases of oral cancer can be treated if found early enough. Undetected, oral cancer can spread to other parts of the body and become harder to treat. Treatment can be very disfiguring if left undiagnosed.
- **Wear and tear from tooth grinding.** Called [bruxism](#), teeth grinding may be caused by stress or [anxiety](#). Over time, it can wear down the biting surfaces of teeth, making them more susceptible to decay. If your teeth show signs of [bruxism](#), your dentist may recommend a mouth guard worn at night to prevent grinding.
- **Signs of gum disease.** Gum disease, also called gingivitis or more advanced called periodontitis, is the leading cause of tooth loss in older people. "Unfortunately, by the time most people notice any of the warning signs of periodontitis, it's too late to reverse the damage," .Your dental professional should examine your gums for signs of trouble.
- **Interactions with medications.** Older patients, especially those on multiple medications, are at risk of [dry mouth](#), or xerostomia. Reduced saliva flow increases the risk of decay and gum problems. As many as 800 different drugs cause [dry mouth](#) as a side effect. "Always tell your dental professional about any medications you take," he says. A change

in [prescriptions](#) may help alleviate the problem. Saliva-like oral mouthwashes are also available.

“Almost all tooth decay and most gum disease can be prevented with good oral hygiene,”

**“We’re talking about taking a few minutes each day to brush and floss. That’s not a lot in return for a lifetime of healthy teeth and gums.”**