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**How to keep your teeth healthy**

**Diet, acids, sugars and frequency of meals.**

Teeth are designed for chewing our food. They are not designed to be constantly subjected to acids and unnecessary wear.
Acids remove tooth enamel and weaken the teeth.

There are two types of acids that we encounter on a daily basis:

* Direct acids, which we put in our mouths from acidic foods like fruit juices, most fruits (some more acidic than others), soft drinks, vinegar, salad dressings, etc. And
* Indirect acids which are produced by our own oral bacteria when they process the foods we put in our mouths.  The foods which cause the oral bacteria to produce most acid are sugars and starch (from foods like biscuits, white bread, crisps etc)

**Your teeth need a 3-4 hour break between meals in order to recover**

In between meals, the teeth should rest, as the oral environment needs to return to its natural balance.  Your teeth need 3-4 hours’ rest between meals. During this time, you should avoid eating or drinking anything apart from plain tap water or possibly plain tea or coffee preferably without milk or sugar. Tea contains a bit of fluoride (which repairs early loss of mineral from enamel), and is beneficial for the teeth. To count as a break, do not have any biscuits or other foods with you tea or coffee.

The worst foods for the teeth are very sour sweets, food or drink that contains sugar and foods that stick to the teeth like crisps and sweetened breakfast cereals.

The next best way to stop an acid from damaging your teeth is to rinse the mouth with a fluoride mouthwash. **The best way is to avoid the acid.**

*For example:*

If you finish your breakfast with a glass of orange juice, if you drink lemonade or have vinegar on your chips, your teeth will start losing enamel.

**How to stop an acid from damaging your teeth**

After putting any acids in your mouth, **stop the damage immediately by rinsing with a fluoride mouthwash**, then wait 30 minutes before you brush your teeth.

Another good method is to dissolve some bicarbonate of soda in a glass of water and rinse it around in the mouth.

You can also apply a smear of fluoride toothpaste on the tongue and lick the toothpaste over the teeth.

If you do occasionally want to treat yourself to a glass of orange juice, or any acidic or sweet foods you can minimise the damage by following the advice given above

**“How often” is worse than “how much”**

Because the amount of saliva in the mouth is small, it is usually enough with very small amounts of acidic or sweet foods to cause the damage. The mouth will eventually return to a healthy balance but this takes between 20-45 minutes. One small raisin will still lead to up to 45 minutes of damage in the same way as a large chocolate bar. Therefore, if you want to treat yourself, choose one time of the day (dinner for example) to satisfy your craving. If you need to drink an orange juice, or a soft drink or eat a chocolate or have some sweets, do it all in one go at the end of a meal. This way, you will have satisfied your desire and you would have subjected your teeth to only one acid attack. Choosing dinnertime for this purpose allows you to rinse your mouth with a fluoride mouthwash then after 30 minutes or longer you can brush your teeth.

Since the acid attacks, which damage our teeth last for up to 45 min regardless of how much we eat, you will not gain anything by treating yourself in small and frequent quantities. Do not have  “just a biscuit” or a small sip  of juice or a small piece of chocolate too often. If you want to treat yourself, you might just wait until dinnertime then do it properly.

**Remember!**

* Give your teeth a 3-4-hour break between meals!
* Avoid frequent snacks!
* **After each meal, if you can**,
	+ Brush your teeth. If you cannot brush after each meal, brush at least 2 times per day.
	+ Finish your meal with a crunchy vegetable (carrot, stalk of celery,  cauliflower, piece of bell pepper, sweet pepper, leaf of cabbage, a small stick of cut up swede, cucumber) to help clean the teeth and stimulate saliva.
	+ Chew some sugar-free chewing gum for 10 minutes or
	+ **Extra fluoride applications i.e. more than 2 times per day either as a mouth wash or as applications of toothpaste on the teeth** is for people who have a high rate of decay or have an increased risk of dental decay due to frequent snacking, mouth dryness due to medication or other reasons. Patients who have a high rate of developing decay (More than one filling every 3-4 years), should ask their dentist about the most appropriate prevention programme. Often this means smearing a small amount of toothpaste on the teeth after a meal and spitting out the excess. Alternatively, using a fluoride mouth wash correctly will also be beneficial.

When you have finished brushing, spit out excess toothpaste but do not rinse with water! If you rinse with water, you will get rid of the fluoride. If you absolutely want to rinse your teeth after brushing, use a fluoride mouthwash.

Unless you have been recommended by your dentist, or if you do not have a high rate of dental decay, you do not have to use a mouth wash for your regular dental hygiene as long as you skip the rinsing with water at the end of your brushing.  It does not hurt to use one if you use it correctly and in some cases it can even be beneficial but for the majority us, as long as our diets and brushing technique is good, we do not need a fluoride mouth wash.

Children under 7 or anybody who accidentally or habitually swallows the mouthwash while they rinse, should definitely avoid using a fluoride mouth wash. Avoid swallowing frequent or large amounts of fluoride containing products whether they are toothpaste or fluoride mouth washes.

**Oral hygiene**

Spend the time needed for oral hygiene and do all required steps. In dental school we were asked: “Do you clean your teeth properly or do you just brush them?” Research shows that adults brush their teeth on average for 45 seconds. The time needed should for a fully dentate mouth be 2 minutes! This is why we recommend electric toothbrushes; most good ones have a timer to remind you of the time needed to brush properly. Start by cleaning between the teeth either by using floss, interdental brushes or dental toothpicks. Brush your teeth for two minutes patiently and thoroughly without too much pressure. Cleaning your tongue is also a good idea.

DO NOT SMOKE! - This increases the risk of mouth cancer. Ask your dentist to refer you to professional NHS Quit Smoking courses. They work!

Alcohol - Keep alcohol consumption to a minimum. Heavy drinkers also have a higher risk of developing mouth cancer

**Regular Check ups - Visit your dentist regularly**

## Now, for more detailed advice, please click the links below and read the information!

### [Why prevention?](http://www.lighthousedentalpractice.co.uk/dental-health-key-advice.html)

### [Why do the children of today have better teeth than in the past?](http://www.lighthousedentalpractice.co.uk/dental-health-key-advice.html)

### [If children have good teeth, why bother with prevention?](http://www.lighthousedentalpractice.co.uk/dental-health-key-advice.html)

### [Why bother to fill baby teeth? They will be shed anyway.](http://www.lighthousedentalpractice.co.uk/dental-health-key-advice.html)

### [So if the baby teeth hurt why not just take them out?](http://www.lighthousedentalpractice.co.uk/dental-health-key-advice.html)

### [Ok then, what if you leave them in?](http://www.lighthousedentalpractice.co.uk/dental-health-key-advice.html)

### [What causes decay and gum disease?](http://www.lighthousedentalpractice.co.uk/dental-health-key-advice.html)

### [How do children get the first germs in their mouths?](http://www.lighthousedentalpractice.co.uk/dental-health-key-advice.html)

### [How do bacteria harm our teeth?](http://www.lighthousedentalpractice.co.uk/dental-health-key-advice.html)

### [Sugars, acids and starches](http://www.lighthousedentalpractice.co.uk/dental-health-key-advice.html)

### [Fluoride](http://www.lighthousedentalpractice.co.uk/dental-health-key-advice.html)

### [Fluoride toxicity](http://www.lighthousedentalpractice.co.uk/dental-health-key-advice.html)

### [What do we mean by a good oral hygiene?](http://www.lighthousedentalpractice.co.uk/dental-health-key-advice.html)

### [Which individuals may be prone to dental decay](http://www.lighthousedentalpractice.co.uk/dental-health-key-advice.html)

### [How to choose the right toothpaste](http://www.lighthousedentalpractice.co.uk/dental-health-key-advice.html)

### [How to choose the right toothbrush?](http://www.lighthousedentalpractice.co.uk/dental-health-key-advice.html)

### [Flossing or cleaning between the teeth - Is it important?](http://www.lighthousedentalpractice.co.uk/dental-health-key-advice.html)

### [What mouthwash?](http://www.lighthousedentalpractice.co.uk/dental-health-key-advice.html)

### [Do antibacterial mouthwashes cure gum disease?](http://www.lighthousedentalpractice.co.uk/dental-health-key-advice.html)

### [Are whitening toothpastes effective?](http://www.lighthousedentalpractice.co.uk/dental-health-key-advice.html)

### [Sensitive teeth](http://www.lighthousedentalpractice.co.uk/dental-health-key-advice.html)

### [Other tips](http://www.lighthousedentalpractice.co.uk/dental-health-key-advice.html)

### [Miscellaneous](http://www.lighthousedentalpractice.co.uk/dental-health-key-advice.html)

### [Key points for correct brushing of children teeth](http://www.lighthousedentalpractice.co.uk/dental-health-key-advice.html)

To download the detailed dental advice shown above in a printable pdf document please click here - [Dental Advice PDF](http://www.lighthousedentalpractice.co.uk/Preventive-Advice1.pdf)

To download the advice on brushing children teeth in a printable pdf document please click here - [Tooth Brushing Advice PDF](http://www.lighthousedentalpractice.co.uk/tooth-brushing.pdf)