

Your child's heart problem and dental care

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Children with heart problems are at increased risk of developing an infection in the heart called endocarditis. This condition can have a damaging effect on the heart itself (particularly the valves in the heart), and will need treatment with lots of antibiotic medicines. Some children may even need heart surgery to repair or replace damaged valves.

In the past, antibiotics used to be given at the time of dental or surgical treatment to help prevent endocarditis. This is no longer recommended in the UK because it has been found that dental hygiene and excellent care of the teeth have a more important role in preventing endocarditis.

Why is dental health important for my child?

It is very important for your child's dental health to be at its best. If it is not, bacteria (germs) that cause dental decay and gum disease can enter the bloodstream, causing serious infection. The most severe outcome is infective endocarditis. Bacteria can enter the bloodstream when the dentist either extracts (removes) teeth, or scales (cleans) them.

What is tooth decay and what causes it?

Tooth decay causes damage to teeth. If it is not treated in time, someone with tooth decay may need fillings or extractions. Decay is caused when bacteria in the mouth feed off the sugar we eat, which is deposited on the teeth. The bacteria form acids, which attack the enamel coating of the tooth. Over time, the enamel will break down, forming a cavity (hole).



Teeth damaged by decay

How can I prevent this from happening to my child?

Decay can be prevented as follows.

Diet – all sugars cause decay. Sugars occur naturally in some foods such as fruit, and are added to other foods. It is important to cut down on sugary foods, especially between meals to prevent ‘acid attacks’, which cause dental decay. Foods that say they have ‘no added sugar’ may still contain natural sugars, which can also cause dental decay.

It is important to restrict sweets, chocolate and cakes to mealtimes. Foods that are less likely to cause decay are called safe snacks. These include cheese, bread, raw fruit and vegetables, and rice cakes.

Remember it is not the amount of sugar your child eats or drinks, but how often they do it that is important.

Infants should stop breastfeeding and having milk from a bottle by their first birthday.

You should not allow your child to fall asleep with a bottle unless it contains plain water

Brushing teeth – your child should brush their teeth twice a day with children’s toothpaste (not adult). Ensure your child does not rinse their mouth out after brushing. This will allow the toothpaste to have a maximum effect on the teeth.

Children under three should use a small brush and a smear of toothpaste. Older children should use only a pea-sized amount of toothpaste. Younger children should be supervised by an adult.

It is important that once they have brushed their teeth your child does not have anything else to eat or drink, apart from water at bedtime if necessary.

Fluoride – apart from toothpaste, another good source of fluoride is a mouthwash. We generally recommend that children of seven years of age or above (or younger if they are able to spit it out properly) use a mouthwash. It is important to use a children’s mouthwash as these are alcohol-free. Rather than rinsing after brushing, it is more effective to rinse after a meal so that the teeth are exposed to fluoride at another time in the day.

What is dental erosion and what causes it?

Acidic food and drink can be harmful to teeth. The acids wear away the enamel. This is called ‘erosion’. This can cause ‘thinning’ of the teeth, which can damage them and make them more sensitive. Acidic foods and drinks should be limited to mealtimes. It is important to note that citric fruits such as oranges, apples and fresh fruit juices contain acid. Rinsing with a fluoride mouthwash after consuming an acid food or drink can help prevent erosion.



Dental erosion on back teeth

What is gum disease?

Gum disease (sometimes called 'gingivitis') is inflammation of the gums. It is caused when plaque (the sticky substance that forms when bacteria collects on the surface of your teeth) is not removed from the teeth and gums during brushing. The plaque causes the gums to become swollen and inflamed, which can result in bleeding when brushing. If you notice the gums are bleeding it is important to keep brushing the area as it will reduce over time with good effective brushing. Please speak to your dentist or hygienist for advice of effective ways to brush the teeth.



Inflamed gums in a child patient

Registering with a dentist

Everyone should be registered with a dentist once their teeth become visible. Routine check-ups are essential every four to six months. The dentist will be able to provide plastic coatings which are placed into the biting surface of the teeth to protect them from decay. These are called fissure sealants.

Contact details

If you have any further queries please do not hesitate to contact us.

Department of Paediatric Dentistry
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For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit **w:** www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/leaflets

Evelina London Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your child's medicines, please speak to the staff caring for them or contact our helpline.

t: 020 7188 3003, Monday to Friday, 10am-5pm

e: letstalkmedicines@gstt.nhs.uk

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints) **e:**
complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

Language and accessible support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch.

t: 020 7188 8815 **e:** languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

Leaflet number: 4139/VER2

Date published: December 2018

Review date: December 2021

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A list of sources is available on request