

# Your child's heart problem and dental care

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## Why dental care is important

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 would need treatment with 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 routinely 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.

It is important for your child's dental health to be at its best, to reduce the chances of bacteria entering the bloodstream and causing infective endocarditis.

## Registering with a dentist

Everyone should be registered with a dentist once their first teeth come through. Routine check-ups are essential every 4 to 6 months, and the dentist should apply a topical fluoride paste to the teeth 2 to 4 times per year to help prevent decay. They can also place plastic coatings (fissure sealants) on the back teeth to protect them from decay.

## What is tooth decay?

Tooth decay is caused when bacteria in the mouth feed off the sugar we eat. The bacteria form acids, which attack the enamel coating of the tooth. Over time, the enamel will break down and form a cavity (hole).



Teeth damaged by decay

## How to stop decay

### Diet

It is important to cut down on sugary foods, especially between meals to stop dental decay. Beware that foods with 'no added sugar' may still contain natural sugars.

It is important to reduce sugary foods such as raisins, sweets, chocolate, biscuits, and cakes. Remember it is not the amount of sugar your child eats or drinks, but how often they do it that is important, so restrict sugary foods to mealtimes.

Foods that are less likely to cause decay are called safe snacks, such as cheese, bread sticks, crackers, fresh fruit, vegetables, and rice cakes. Safe drinks are plain water and plain milk. Squashes and fruit juices are high in sugar so it is important to restrict these to mealtimes only.

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 a fluoride toothpaste containing 1,350 to 1,450ppm of fluoride. Encourage your child to spit after brushing but not to rinse with water, so the toothpaste has a maximum effect.

Children under 3 years old should use a smear of toothpaste. Older children should use a pea-sized amount. Help your child with brushing until they are at least 8 years old. It is important that once they have brushed their teeth at bedtime, your child does not have anything to eat or drink other than water.

### **Fluoride**

Apart from toothpaste, another good source of fluoride is a mouthwash, which we recommend for children of 7 years of age and over. 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?

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 such as fruit juices 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.

## 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.



## Contact us

If you have any queries, please **tel:** 020 7188 4403.

For more information on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit **web:** [www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/leaflets](http://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, **tel:** 020 7188 3003, Monday to Friday, 10am-5pm, **email:** [letstalkmedicines@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:letstalkmedicines@gstt.nhs.uk)

### Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS), **tel:** 020 7188 8801, **email:** [pals@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@gstt.nhs.uk). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

**tel:** 020 7188 3514, **email:** [complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto: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.

**tel:** 020 7188 8815, **email:** [languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk)

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