

# WORD OF MOUTH

MAGAZINE



**Oral Health  
Foundation**

Better oral health for all

ISSUE 96 | JANUARY 2023 It is the beginning of a new year so in this issue we are talking about everything that you need to know about how to take care of your oral health. It also covers oral health advice for the elderly and kids.

## Editor's Welcome

Hello, Happy New Year and welcome to a brand-new issue of Word of Mouth – the Oral Health Foundation's digital magazine.

It's the end of January and now that all the celebrations are over, this edition will ensure you've got your mouth in order.

Buckle up and go through brushing top tips our experts have selected for you. These will help you to stay on top of your oral health routine and make sure you do it correctly.

Now that the festive season is over, your fridge and food cupboards need healthy top-ups, right? Discover what foods and drinks are good for the health of your mouth. These will not only your body in good shape but make sure your mouth is in great condition too.

Keeping up with your New Year's resolutions so far? Don't forget to add oral health to the list! In this issue, we'll be giving you some great ideas to get you smiling.

We also have articles about the benefits of fluoride, mouthwash, interdental cleaning, and advice for older people and kids.

I hope you enjoy this latest issue and see you again in March.



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Editor, Word of Mouth

# Contents



**16** Taking care of children's teeth



Oral health on the go with sugar-free chewing gum **23**

**5** Top tips for being a great brusher

**8** 5 of the most common dental problems that can wreak havoc on your mouth

**12** The secrets of a tooth-friendly diet

**20** The benefits of using mouthwash

**25** Dental care for older people

**28** Mind the gap – cleaning in between your teeth

**30** Going all in on fluoride

**32** Dry January – the relationship between alcohol and oral health

**36** New year's resolutions to keep your mouth healthy

# Top tips for being a great brusher

There are not many better feelings than having a set of freshly cleaned teeth.

Brushing your teeth has been shown to have a positive effect on your mood while doing wonders for your confidence throughout the day.

The twice-daily brush also maintains the health of your mouth and helps keep diseases like tooth decay and gum disease at bay. This makes brushing your teeth one of the most important jobs of the day.

Having a good toothbrushing routine is the cornerstone of great oral health. This includes knowing the best techniques for effective cleaning. To help you keep your teeth for life, the Oral Health Foundation has put together some top tips for being a smile-saving brusher.

## Toothbrushes and toothpaste

Most people get their oral health products at the supermarket where there are so many different choices, people can feel overwhelmed. This can

often make it hard to pick out the right items. One of the best ways to narrow it down is to ask your dentist or hygienist for a recommendation for the most appropriate products for your dental needs.

For example, if you have teeth missing or gaps, you may need a different style toothbrush head that is shaped for easier access to all the areas in your mouth.

If you particularly struggle with brushing your teeth, you may also need a thinner neck and a longer handle. Another way that you can improve your dental health, is to get an electric toothbrush. An electric toothbrush does not need to cost the earth, many suitable ones on the market are around £15-£20.

Your dentist or dental team may be able to recommend an electric toothbrush that is good value for you. The best electric toothbrushes have an oscillating



and rotating head, a 2-minute timer, and a pressure sensor.

There are many different varieties of toothpaste available in the shops and supermarkets. Brushing your teeth can be far more beneficial with the right toothpaste for you. For example, if you are more at risk of tooth decay, especially around the necks of your teeth, you may require toothpaste with a higher concentration of fluoride.

If you have gum disease, a



toothpaste with an antibacterial ingredient may be the one for you.

Many people suffer with sensitive teeth, they should choose a de-sensitising toothpaste to help with their symptoms. Drinking lots of coffee, red wine and smoking can stain our teeth, using a whitening toothpaste can help to combat these stains.

You should also change your toothbrush or electric toothbrush head once the brush begins to splay and loses its shape, every three months or after an illness.

### Checking your timing

You should be brushing your teeth twice a day for two minutes using fluoride toothpaste.

Often people rush through this, they are tired and want to go to sleep or they are late for work. You may miss areas and that could lead to



gum disease and tooth decay.

Brushing at night so that you are going to bed with clean teeth is incredibly important, as the flow of saliva reduces by about 50% whilst we are asleep. If your teeth are clean, plaque that is produced overnight has nothing to 'feed' on so there is less risk of damage to the enamel on your teeth. Research by the Oral Health Foundation last year found that one-in-four do not brush their teeth in the evening before going to bed. This is a very worrying statistic.

If you struggle with remembering to brush, then set a timer on your phone to remind you and a 2-minute countdown so that you are brushing for the correct length of time.

### What is the correct way to brush?

You should angle your brush at a forty-five-degree angle to your teeth and gums and use the correct amount of toothpaste on the brush before starting, a pea-sized amount for both adults and children from age three and up. Children over 3 years old and adults should use toothpaste that contains between 1,350-1,500 ppm fluoride, under 3's should use a pea sized smear of toothpaste with at least 1,000 ppm fluoride.

Brush in small, circular motions around all areas of the mouth. Including the front and back of teeth, the top of teeth, and round the back of molars.

It is important to cover all areas as dental decay can form in any part of the tooth, another reason why you should also clean in between teeth..

### Interdental brushing

Interdental brushing involves cleaning in between your teeth, typically using an interdental brush, tape, or floss. An interdental brush, like a normal toothbrush, should suit the needs of an individual mouth. Ask your dentist or hygienist to recommend the type and sizes of interdental brushes you should be using.

For example, most interdental brushes are colour-

coded depending on size. You may need several different sizes depending on the different-sized gaps in your mouth.

You should not be using anything in your mouth or in between your teeth that is not designed for this purpose. e.g., pieces of string instead of proper dental floss. If you need to use a toothpick, we would advise using soft plastic or rubberised toothpicks rather than wooden ones which can splinter and damage gums, but still, use these with caution as toothpicks can be quite wide and hurt your gums.

If you are unsure how to clean interdentally, then please go visit our website for more information at <https://www.dentalhealth.org/Blog/brushing-and-beyond-taking-care-of-your-oral-health>.



# 5 of the most common dental problems that can wreak havoc on your mouth

Oral diseases are some of the most common health problems in the world.

An astonishing 3.5 billion people around the world suffer from diseases in their mouths. For many, they cause daily discomfort, for others, they lead to pain and for some, oral diseases reduce their quality of life.

Here are some of the most common oral diseases, and how you can keep them at bay.



## Tooth decay

Tooth decay is caused by plaque that forms in the mouth. This plaque reacts with the sugars in your foods and drinks and produces plaque acids. It is these plaque acids that damage the teeth, causing them to become softer and eventually decay.

Tooth decay does not always cause pain in the

tooth until it becomes more advanced. This is why it is important to visit your dentist regularly, as often as they recommend. Your dentists can pick up early signs of tooth decay, remove it and repair the tooth with a filling. If tooth decay is left untreated, the tooth may eventually have to be removed.

Tooth decay is the world's most common health condition and affects around 2.3 billion people.

In the UK, almost one in three (31%) of adults have tooth decay while it is also extremely common in young children.

Reducing how much sugar you have, and how often you have it, is the best way to prevent tooth decay.

## Gum disease

Gum disease is the swelling, soreness, or infection of the tissues supporting the teeth. There are two stages of gum disease – gingivitis and periodontitis.

Gingivitis is when the gums around the teeth become very red and swollen. Often the swollen gums bleed when they are brushed during cleaning. Long-standing gingivitis, if left untreated, can progress into periodontal disease, however at the gingivitis stage, with a good and effective oral hygiene routine, you can prevent the progression.

As the periodontal disease gets worse the gums around the teeth will begin to recede, with this the bone anchoring the teeth in the jaw will start to be lost, causing the teeth to become loose. If this is not treated, the teeth may eventually fall out.

Unfortunately, severe periodontal disease is estimated to affect around 19% of the global adult population, representing more than 1 billion

cases worldwide according to WHO (World Health Organisation). In recent years, gum disease has been linked with general health conditions such as diabetes, strokes, cardiovascular disease, poor pregnancy outcomes, and even dementia.

To prevent and treat gum disease, you need to make sure you remove all the plaque from your teeth every day. This is done by effective toothbrushing and cleaning in between the teeth with 'interdental' brushes, tape, or floss.

## Mouth cancer

Mouth cancer is cancer that affects the lips, gums, tongue, cheeks, and throat.

Each year, there were around 750,000 new cases of mouth cancer around the world and for men, it is one of the ten most common cancers. In the UK, the number of people diagnosed with mouth cancer has doubled in the last generation.

There are several factors that are likely to increase your risk. Smoking, drinking alcohol to excess, and HPV (a sexually transmitted disease) are the main causes of mouth cancer.

Because around 90% of all mouth cancers are linked to lifestyle factors, it means that with a few



small changes, you can help cut your chances of developing mouth cancer. Try to stop or at least reduce the things that might put you at greater risk.

It is important that you do self-checks at home and regularly visit your dentist, especially if your lifestyle means that you are at higher risk of developing mouth cancer.

## Sensitive teeth

Having sensitive teeth can mean anything from getting a mild twinge to having severe discomfort that can continue for several hours. It can also be an early warning sign of more serious dental problems.

Most people will suffer from tooth sensitivity at some stage in their life and it is more common in people between 20 and 40 years old.

Sensitive teeth can be caused by:

- Brushing your teeth too vigorously. Overbrushing your teeth or scrubbing side-

to-side can cause the gums to recede. This exposes the dentine underneath the gums, a dentine has nerve endings in it, every time you have anything hot or cold, these nerve endings will react and cause the short, sharp pain that is indicative of tooth sensitivity.

- Your gums recede over your lifetime, so tooth sensitivity can affect the older generation more.
- Cracked or broken teeth can expose dentine which would cause you to experience sensitivity.
- Gum disease can cause the gums to swell and pull away from them, this will also cause sensitivity to extremes of hot and cold.

There is toothpaste available to help with the sensitivity as well as other products. If you experience any symptoms of tooth sensitivity, discuss this with your dentist or another member of your dental health team and if necessary, they can recommend a suitable treatment for you.

## Mouth ulcers

Mouth ulcers are painful sores that appear inside the mouth. They are usually red or yellow.

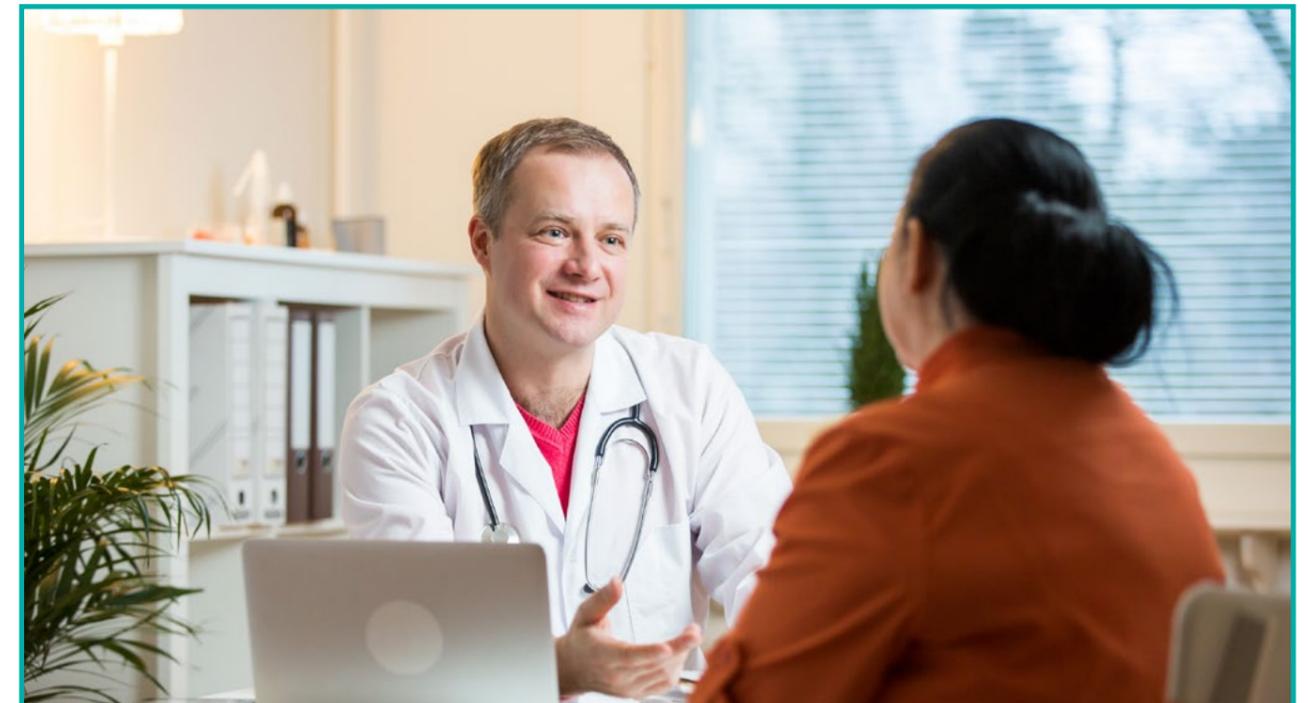
The research shows that one-in-ten people are affected by mouth ulcers.

Usually, a single mouth ulcer is due to damage caused by biting the cheek or tongue, or by sharp teeth, brushing, or poorly fitting dentures. These ulcers are called 'traumatic' ulcers. If you have a

number of mouth ulcers, and they keep coming back, this is called 'recurrent aphthous stomatitis'.

You can reduce your risk of mouth ulcers by keeping your mouth as clean and healthy as possible. Using high-quality toothbrushes can help, as can eating a good diet that is rich in vitamins A, C, and E.

If an ulcer lasts more than 3 weeks, you should always ask your dental team or doctor for advice. They may be able to tell you the cause and provide treatment, or they may arrange more tests and refer you to a specialist if needed.



## Sources

<https://www.dentalhealth.org/oral-health-statistics>

<https://www.dentalhealth.org/gum-disease>

<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/oral-health>

<https://www.dentalhealth.org/sensitive-teeth>

# The secrets of a tooth-friendly diet

It is after Christmas and truth be told, we have all eaten too many mince pies, gingerbread men, and chocolates. Whatever has taken your fancy, we have probably indulged and now are thinking of making a few changes for the new year ahead.

However, have you thought about a diet with a twist? A tooth-friendly diet could certainly make a much more interesting start to the year and does not have to be that much of a change to feel better about your mouth's health.

## Cut back on alcohol

We all know that alcohol is bad for you, especially your liver but did you know it can affect your mouth as well?

Alcoholic drinks such as white wine, beer, and cider can be very acidic. This will cause erosion of the enamel on your teeth, leading to pain and sensitivity. One of the worst offenders is prosecco. Not only is it highly acidic and fizzy but contains sugar too, typically 1.5 grams per standard glass.

Spirits such as vodka and whiskey are extremely high in alcohol and will give you a dry mouth. A dry mouth can be particularly bad as it stops your mouth from staying hydrated and is susceptible to acid attacking your teeth as there is less saliva to dilute the concentration.

Many mixers and alcopops are high in sugar, think of Coca-Cola and rum as prime examples. This can cause dental decay due to the plaque in your mouth quickly multiplying and feeding on the energy boost they receive.

## Look for the hidden sugars

Hidden sugars are found in many products in your supermarkets including both food and drink. A few years ago, a sugar tax on fizzy drinks was implemented which has reduced its impact on your health.

Dr Nigel Carter OBE, Chief Executive of the Oral Health Foundation says: "The sugar tax has been a significant



success, not only for oral health but for general health and wellbeing too. The more sugar we can continue to cut from drinks, the healthier our population will be. It will allow more of us to be free of the diseases and conditions linked to sugar, and it will also save the NHS millions every year."

Many diseases are linked with a high intake of sugar such as diabetes and heart disease, but it also does not do your teeth any favours. While making dinner why not try to cut out as much sugar as possible by looking at the sugar content in what you buy?

Even typically healthy food such as yogurts and soups can have a hidden number of sugars in them. If you are making something yourself such as spaghetti Bolognese, why not try to make a healthier sauce yourself and not put any sugar in? Chopped onions, garlic, tomatoes, and no room for added sugar.



## Watch that acidity level

Fruit juices can be a hidden cause of tooth decay, especially in young children. While they are full of vitamins and nutrients perfect for a happy healthy body, your mouth may very well be another story.

Juice can be very acidic which is why it is important to not be constantly sipping on it throughout the day. This will keep the acidity level in your mouth extremely high and attack the enamel surrounding and protecting teeth causing erosion of the enamel. Once the enamel is lost it cannot 'grow' back, therefore it is important to keep it as strong and healthy as possible.

Early tooth decay can have no obvious symptoms as you may not even be in pain, but your

dentist will be able to spot a cavity in its early stages when they examine your teeth. This is why you should visit your dentist regularly, as small cavities are much easier to treat than advanced decay.

“Ensuring that you brush your teeth last thing at night and at least one other time during the day with fluoride toothpaste is the first step in combating tooth decay and while the foundation would never deny you your favourite drinks, we do want to inform you on how to effectively avoid painful dental health problems,” Dr Carter adds.

### Be smart with snacks and only have sugar at mealtimes

Every time you eat or drink anything containing sugars, these acids attack the teeth and start to soften and dissolve the enamel. The attacks can last for an hour after eating or drinking, before the natural salts in your saliva cause the enamel to ‘remineralise’ and harden again.

Having sugary or acidic snacks and drinks between meals can increase the risk of tooth decay, because your teeth come under constant attack and do not have time to recover.

Because of this, it is better for your teeth and general health if you eat three meals a day instead of having seven to ten snacks.

If you do need to snack between meals, choose foods that do not contain sugar. Fruit does contain acids, which can erode your teeth. However, this is only damaging to your teeth if you eat an unusually large amount.

Savoury snacks like cheese, raw vegetables, nuts and breadsticks are the best choices.

So, there you have it, some ideas to keep your mouth in tip-top shape for the coming year. If you would like to find out some more about how to improve your mouth health, go to <https://www.dentalhealth.org> to visit and discover even more about how to look after your mouth.



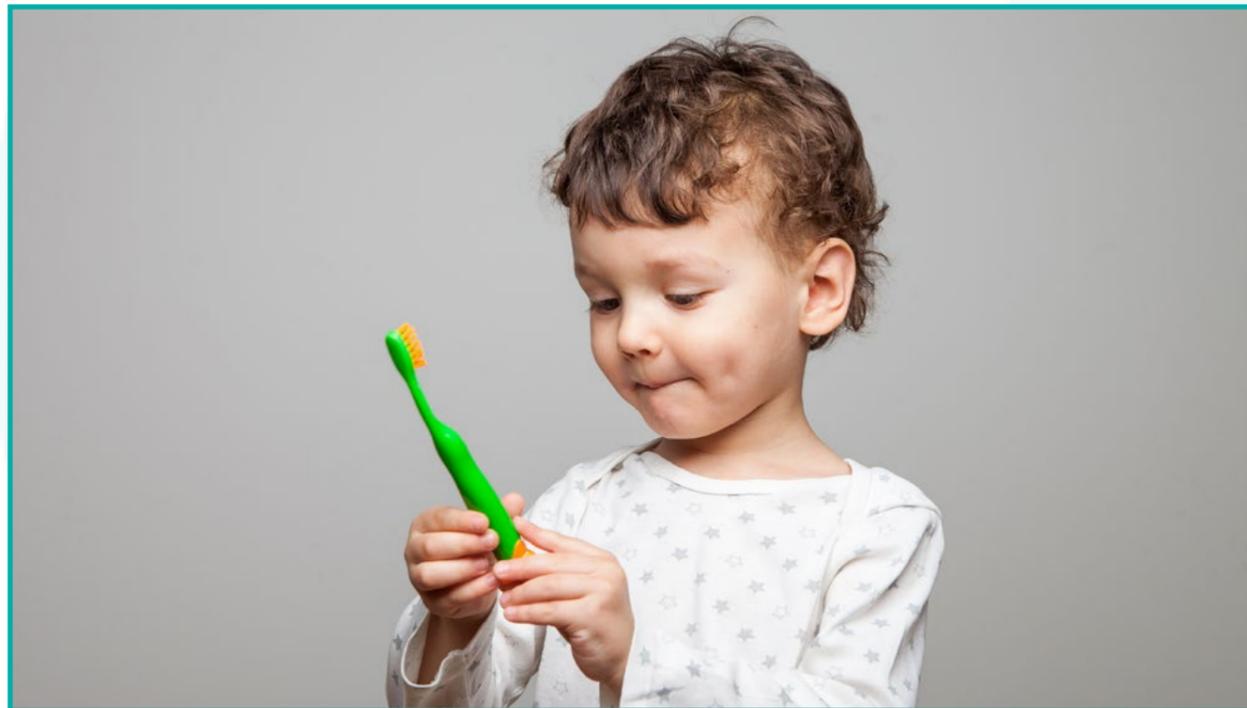
# A healthy diet is an essential milestone to a healthy smile foundation.

Want to find out more about which foods and drinks are good and bad for you?

Simply click on the link below to get more information and stay on top of your diet and a healthy mouth.

[www.dentalhealth.org/diet-and-my-teeth](https://www.dentalhealth.org/diet-and-my-teeth)

# Taking care of children's teeth



Cleaning children's teeth can often seem a daunting challenge. After all, they are tired, you are exhausted, and facing a tantrum at the end of the day or early in the morning is not exactly what you would call a peaceful time.

However, the building blocks for a healthy, happy future can be laid down in these times. As stressful as it may seem, there are ways that you can make cleaning your children's teeth just that little bit easier.

## Do I need to worry about visiting the dentist and their first tooth?

Children can be nervous about anything new,

including sights, sounds, and smells. Therefore, it is important to get started as soon as possible, when their first tooth comes through make sure that you clean it last thing at night and one other time during the day using a toothpaste that contains at least 1000 ppm of fluoride. This will become part of your child's personal hygiene routine and create good habits that will last a lifetime. Often, a dentist will recommend cleaning it by wiping the new teeth, as they erupt with a little cloth, ask your dentist what will be best for

your child. It is recommended that your baby has their first dental visit before the age of 1 year.

If you are unsure about how to brush properly yourself then please visit [www.dentalhealth.org/brush-time](http://www.dentalhealth.org/brush-time).

Taking your child to the dentist early on will also make it easier to help prevent them from becoming scared of the dentist as it becomes a natural part of everyday life.

You could turn it into a much more pleasant experience as well by connecting it with some reward. For example, "you did so well at the dentist, I'm going to take you to the park for an hour".

Some people may not think to take their children to the dentist until their adult teeth start to come through. However, baby or milk teeth are very important, and losing them early, due to dental decay, can have a detrimental effect on the child. It can affect their eating, speech, smiling, and confidence. The permanent teeth may 'come through' in the wrong position, causing the need for orthodontic treatment (braces) at a later stage.

Therefore, looking after their baby teeth and preventing decay through good toothbrushing and a healthy diet can reduce the number of children suffering from dental decay. Tooth decay in children can cause severe pain, lack of sleep, and poor school attendance. This will often result in the child needing to have the decayed teeth removed under a general anaesthetic. In fact, the main reason for children having a general anaesthetic is tooth extraction. There are over 35,000 hospital extractions for children per year, costing the NHS around £1,014.62 per child.

**Ref:** *National Schedule of NHS Costs Year: 2018-19 – All NHS trusts and NHS foundation trusts – HRG Data*

## When can I start letting them brush themselves?

It is important to supervise your child's brushing until they are at least seven. It is often a big step to start letting children brush their teeth. However, from an earlier age, you can start letting them take a turn cleaning their own teeth. If you brush their teeth initially, you can then let them have a go themselves. This will help your child to familiarise themselves and develop their own brushing technique. You could let them pick out their own brushes to make it more enjoyable. There are many different types of children's toothbrushes, including brightly coloured brushes, some that change colour, some with favourite characters on the handle, and some with a timer. These all encourage children to brush their teeth. The most important thing is to use a small-headed toothbrush with soft, nylon bristles, suitable for the age of your child.



Using a power toothbrush, suitable for the age of your child, can help to make brushing fun and make sure your child brushes for the correct amount of time. It can help to get a little timer if their brush does not have one to make sure they are brushing for the correct length of time. You should ideally be brushing your child's teeth for at least two minutes twice a day with a toothpaste that contains an amount of fluoride suitable for their age.

### [Should I really be using fluoride with my children?](#)

All children up to three years old should use a smear of toothpaste with a fluoride level of at least 1000 ppm (parts per million). After three years old, they should use a pea-sized amount of toothpaste that contains 1,350 ppm to 1,500 ppm.

While some areas in the UK have fluoridated water, many still do not yet have access to this.

You can check the level of fluoride on the packaging of the toothpaste in shops and supermarkets

Fluoride has had extensive research done on its effects on the human body and there is no evidence that fluoride in our water or in toothpaste, causes any detrimental effects on our health at all. It is important as it helps to strengthen the tooth enamel and prevent tooth decay. The only adverse effect that can happen is a cosmetic change called dental fluorosis. This happens when the enamel on the teeth is still forming, if the child ingests a very large amount of fluoride toothpaste, not with recommended toothpaste use, it can cause the teeth to erupt with faint white marks on them. This is typically not noticeable, and often only noticed when the dentist examines the teeth under bright light. This will not have an adverse effect on the rest of a child's health.

As soon as they are responsible enough and their adult teeth have come through, probably around the age of 10-12 years old, you can also start to introduce them to interdental cleaning and flossing.

You can ask your dentist when they think it should be taught and the best products for your child.

# Every penny goes towards helping people achieve a healthy smile.

Everybody deserves to have good oral health.

By donating to the Oral Health Foundation you are helping the most vulnerable people to achieve a healthier life through better oral health. Every penny counts. Please donate today.

[www.dentalhealth.org/donate](http://www.dentalhealth.org/donate)

# The benefits of using mouthwash

Mouthwash is common on most supermarket shelves and is often a bathroom staple. There are many different types, and each has its own benefits that could help you to achieve the perfect smile.

While mouthwash is no substitute for brushing, daily use of mouthwash can be an excellent addition to your oral health routine.

Some mouthwashes contain fluoride to help prevent tooth decay, and all will help to freshen your breath and wash away bits of food. Others contain anti-bacterial ingredients to help reduce plaque and prevent gum disease.

## Fluoride mouthwashes

Fluoride is the single most important natural mineral for good oral health. This is because it helps to prevent tooth decay.

Fluoride is most commonly seen in toothpaste, but it can also be found in many types of mouthwash.

As well as helping to reduce tooth decay, fluoride mouthwashes can be effective at protecting your tooth enamel. This means that using a mouthwash during the day, is a great way to rebalance your mouth, giving your teeth a welcome top-up of fluoride in between brushing.

Most mouthwashes also contain ingredients that help keep your breath smelling nice and fresh.

## Mouthwashes with chlorhexidine, essential oils, and cetylpyridinium chloride (CPC)

These types of anti-bacterial mouthwashes can help to reduce dental plaque and prevent gum disease. Harmful bacteria attack the gums causing inflammation. If this happens, your gums can become painful and may start to bleed.

The sight of blood can often be very worrying and can lead to people avoiding brushing these areas.

The bleeding is a sign that the teeth and gums are not clean enough, so stopping brushing will lead to more build-up of plaque and debris, which will cause the gums to swell and bleed even more.

Having a mouthwash designed to help manage and prevent gum problems can greatly improve not only dental health but also the quality of life in general. Periodontal disease in its later stages can lead to tooth and bone loss. This can often mean far more invasive treatments than would be necessary if the gum disease was caught and treated early.

Some mouthwashes, especially ones containing Chlorhexidine, are particularly effective at reducing gum infections after surgery, such as following a tooth extraction or when a wisdom tooth is coming through. These mouthwashes can also help if you have a flare-up of your gum disease. Take your dentist's advice on how to use these as they can cause staining, although this can be easily removed by the dental team. It is usually recommended that you only use a chlorhexidine mouthwash for 2 weeks at a time.

Mouthwashes with essential oils and cetylpyridinium chloride (CPC) are also effective at reducing plaque and maintaining good gum health.

## Removing stains

Certain mouthwashes can also help to remove surface stains too.

These are usually labelled under 'teeth whitening' and you should always read the fine print. Of course,

these will not actually whiten the tooth enamel itself but rather remove surface stains to give the teeth the appearance of being whiter.

Your normal everyday diet can certainly impact the teeth's appearance. Coffee, tea, and red wine in particular are things that can lead to staining of the enamel. Many people consume tea and coffee on a daily basis, and the more tea and coffee that you drink, the more staining your teeth will pick up. If this is you, a whitening mouthwash may be a good choice to consider.

## Alcohol in mouthwash

Some mouthwashes contain alcohol because it helps to enhance the taste, helps with cleansing and adds to the antibacterial effect.

However, some people find alcohol mouthwashes too strong and prefer milder ones that are alcohol free.

It is important that mouthwashes with alcohol should be kept away from children.



So, there we have it.

Remember, healthy gums rarely bleed. While effective toothbrushing and interdental cleaning are essential for keeping your gums healthy, mouthwashes have the ability to reduce plaque and keep your mouth in tip-top shape.

Before using a mouthwash for the first time, especially if you are aware of problems in your mouth, ask your dentist. They will be able to help you pick the mouthwash that is best for you and will make sure any problems you are having do not turn into anything more serious.

# Your mouth matters. The Oral Health Foundation is here for you.

We care about your oral health.

That's why, every year, we support thousands of people to help them achieve a healthier life through better oral health.

If you need help, or would simply like to support us in our mission, visit our website and get in touch.

[www.dentalhealth.org](http://www.dentalhealth.org)

## Oral health on the go with **sugar-free chewing gum**

You might be at work, on the road, or socialising with friends. Whenever the health of your mouth needs a little helping hand, there may be times when a toothbrush and toothpaste are not quite right.

In between the morning and night-time brush, your teeth could be under constant acid attack. During this long period of time between brushes, to reduce the effects of these attacks throughout the day, the mouth may need a little support. Thankfully, there's a very easy solution – sugar-free chewing gum.

When most people think of chewing sugar-free gum, the first things that come to mind might be that palate cleanser and pleasant aftertaste. But the benefits of reaching for a piece of sugar-free gum extend far beyond that.

Here's why sugar-free gum is the perfect oral health tool while you are on the go.



## Dental decay and erosion

The most important fact is that chewing sugar-free gum helps to protect your teeth and gums in-between meals. The acid is produced by plaque bacteria, and the sugars in your food and drink, and slowly, over many thousands of attacks, dissolves away the enamel and dentine of the tooth, producing a hole or 'cavity'.

Your teeth are more at risk of acid attack after you have eaten or had a drink containing sugars. Some things that we eat and drink, such as citrus fruit, fruit juices, smoothies and fizzy drinks are full of acids. Here the acids gradually dissolve away the surfaces of the tooth with which they come in contact leading to a thinning of the enamel, known as dental erosion.

You can reduce this acid attack by chewing sugar-free gum for 20 minutes after eating or drinking, as it helps to remineralise the tooth enamel and produce more saliva – the mouth's natural defence against acid.

## Dry mouth and bad breath

Chewing sugar-free gum increases the production of saliva which helps to neutralise the acid from both dental plaque and acidic foods. Both dry mouth and bad breath may be caused by reduced saliva flow. Whenever you chew sugar-free gum, it increases the flow of saliva in the mouth and rids your breath of an unpleasant smell, and makes your mouth feel moist.

Not to forget that sugar-free chewing gum can be used on the go, wherever, and whenever. Whether you want to freshen your breath up before a business meeting or even have a little something to eat – since the gum contains xylitol (a natural sweetener that has a sweetness equal to that of sugar), it will give you that sense of snacking thanks to its sweet taste.

Although chewing sugar-free gum is beneficial for your oral health, it does not substitute for brushing or interdental cleaning. This means you would still have to brush twice a day with fluoride toothpaste and clean in between your teeth at least once a day. The sugar-free gum will only supplement your mouth's defences between those two important dental hygiene tasks.

All things considered, including sugar-free chewing gum in your day-to-day life can be advantageous for both your oral health and social life. It will stimulate your saliva flow in your mouth, making sure to keep dental erosion, decay, bad breath, and dry mouth at bay.

# Dental care for older people

It is not uncommon for people to face health problems as they age, and inevitably become more susceptible to certain health issues when we get older. This may also include oral health problems.

Data shows us that older people are more likely to suffer from sensitive teeth, dry mouth, gum disease, tooth decay, and, on some occasions, tooth loss. However, it does not mean everyone will experience those as they become older.

Here is some advice about the most common oral health conditions that older people might experience.

## Sensitive teeth

The gums may recede (shrink back) as you get older, and your teeth may become a little more sensitive as a result. For people suffering from sensitive teeth, it

is worth trying one of the many brands of toothpaste for sensitive teeth. These are specifically formulated to help ease the symptoms of sensitive teeth. Use toothpaste twice a day to brush your teeth and rub a little onto

the sensitive areas. These kinds of toothpaste can take anything from a few days to several weeks to start to reduce sensitivity.

If, after a few weeks, the symptoms still do not improve, visit the dentist who will be able to apply stronger

desensitising agents.

## Dry mouth

Dry mouth is a condition that affects the flow of saliva, causing your mouth to feel dry, and can happen as you get older. Quite often it is a side effect of medication, especially heart, blood pressure, and depression tablets. The doctor, chemist, or dentist should be able to tell you whether medication can cause problems.

One of the major issues people with dry mouth face is the reduced flow of saliva. Saliva helps to cancel out the acid that attacks your teeth and is a very important part of your dental health. It is vital in fighting tooth decay. This places greater



importance on brushing teeth for two minutes with fluoride toothpaste last thing at night, as saliva flow decreases at night-time. If you have less saliva than usual, ask your dental team for advice. Or you can buy special products, including artificial saliva, in most pharmacies without a prescription. Never suck sugar containing sweets to help with the problem as this will just make things worse.

## Gum disease

Signs of gum disease are swollen gums that bleed regularly when brushing, bad breath, or regular mouth infections. Increasingly loose teeth may also be a problem due to receding gums and bone, a common problem among older people with untreated gum disease.

The first thing to do is visit the dentist for a thorough check-up. The dentist can assess if there is any sign that gum disease has started. The dentist or hygienist will clean teeth thoroughly to remove the scale formed when plaque hardens. They will also demonstrate how to remove plaque successfully yourself, cleaning all the surfaces of teeth thoroughly and effectively. This is done by regularly cleaning surfaces of the teeth. Using interdental brushes or floss will help to keep plaque build-up at bay.

You can prevent gum disease from happening by following these simple steps:

- Thoroughly remove plaque from your teeth by brushing for two minutes, (and dentures if you have them) last thing at night and at least one other time during the day.
- Use a fluoride toothpaste containing 1,350 to 1,500 ppm (parts per million) of fluoride.  
  
There are many special kinds of toothpaste on the market, including tartar control and total care. Your dentist may prescribe a higher-fluoride toothpaste if they think you need it.
- You should clean between your teeth at least once a day using interdental brushes or dental floss.
- Cut down on how often you have food and drinks containing sugar - especially sweets that last longer in the mouth such as boiled sweets or mints. Choose sugar-free sweets as an alternative, but be careful as some sweeteners can cause diarrhea if you have too much.
- Visit your dental team regularly, as often as recommended.

## Tooth loss

Tooth loss is usually the result of tooth decay or gum disease.

With the right home care and help from your dental team, it is possible to keep your teeth for life. Gum disease and tooth decay can be prevented whatever your age.

Therefore, if you choose to take good care of your teeth and mouth while still young and throughout your life, it can result in a better state of oral health when you get older. Keep up with these general tips mentioned before to keep your mouth healthy throughout the ages.

# Caring for elderly can be tough for both the carer and the person in care.

If you are taking care of elderly, we have some important information for you.

Check out the page below to find out more.

[www.dentalhealth.org/caring-for-the-elderly](http://www.dentalhealth.org/caring-for-the-elderly)

# Mind the gap – cleaning in between your teeth

As shocking as it may sound, toothbrushing alone only cleans around two-thirds of your teeth, meaning that one-third is left almost entirely without cleaning.

This includes areas of the mouth where brush bristles are not able to reach such as between your teeth.

Cleaning in between your teeth should be an essential part of your daily routine, and there is a perfect tool for the job.

An interdental brush is a small brush specifically designed to clean between your teeth, where a regular toothbrush does not reach. They can have long or short handles for easier use and are generally colour-coded for the different-sized gaps between your teeth.

Dr Nigel Carter, Chief Executive of the Oral Health Foundation says: “While brushing twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste is most important for a good oral health routine, interdental brushes remove the plaque from in between the teeth. This is the area where most tooth decay and gum disease starts.

“It is a myth that having a good oral health routine begins and ends with brushing our teeth twice a day. This is simply not true”.

It is important to remove the food debris caught between your teeth. The benefit of using an interdental brush is that it gets in between the gaps in your teeth and can clean much closer to the gum than a traditional toothbrush.

## Should I brush or clean interdentally first?

It may not seem important enough for you to do one before another, but recent studies show that interdental cleaning before brushing is the best way to clean your teeth effectively.

The findings of the study prove that cleaning between your teeth loosens bacteria and food debris from between the teeth, which allows brushing to be much more successful at removing plaque. As a result, those who interdentally cleaned before brushing were left with a much cleaner mouth than those who did it afterwards.

Moreover, the research also found that cleaning interdentally before brushing is better for your teeth because more fluoride is likely to remain in your mouth after the routine is finished.

“Fluoride is a natural mineral that protects teeth against tooth decay and reduces the amount of acid that the bacteria on teeth produce,” adds Dr Carter.

## The Oral Health Foundation’s guide to interdental brushing

Interdental brushes come in a range of different sizes but should be able to fit between your teeth comfortably, without having to use much force. You may find you need a couple of different sizes but the best way to find out is to ask your dentist or hygienist the next time you have an appointment.

1. Hold the interdental brush between your thumb and forefinger.
2. Gently place the brush through the gap between your teeth – do not force the brush through the gap.
3. Brush in and out of each space between your teeth.

Although this guide only covers cleaning with interdental brushes, dental floss or other appliances may work better for some people and where you have very tight gaps. If you are unsure of what tools fit you better or are more efficient to use, always ask the advice of your dentist or hygienist as to what is best for your mouth. They will also be able to tell you how effective you are in your cleaning.



# Going all in on fluoride

Fluoride is a natural mineral that is found in many foods and in all drinking water.

Fluoride brings lots of benefits to the mouth, the main one being strengthening the tooth enamel, making it more resistant to tooth decay. Fluoride works by remineralising the enamel on your teeth after acid attacks, making it stronger and more resistant to the plaque acids that are produced when we eat or drink anything.

The mineral has been described as the single most important ingredient that has transformed the oral health of people all around the world.

Here are some of the ways how you might be exposed to the benefits of fluoride.

## Toothpaste

Most kinds of toothpaste now contain fluoride, and most people get their fluoride this way. Fluoride toothpaste is very effective in preventing tooth decay. The amount of fluoride in toothpaste is usually enough to reduce decay. Fluoride toothpaste is regarded as an essential medicine by the World Health Organisation.

In some areas where the water supply has fluoride added, fluoride toothpaste gives extra protection.

It is vital for a person's oral health to brush their teeth twice a day with toothpaste that has the recommended fluoride level of 1,350 - 1,500 ppm (parts per million).

All children up to three years old should use a pea sized smear of toothpaste with a fluoride level of at least 1,000 ppm. After three years old, they should use a pea sized blob of toothpaste that contains 1,350 ppm to 1,500 ppm. Some people who suffer from certain oral health problems might benefit from higher-strength fluoride toothpaste for extra protection.

## Tap water

Fluoride is found naturally in many foods and in water supplies and is also added to some drinking water. Having 0.7 to 1 parts of fluoride for every million parts of water (0.7 ppm to 1 ppm) has been shown to have the

best effect.

All water contains at least some fluoride. Your local water supplier can tell you how much fluoride is in your drinking water.

The addition of fluoride to water has been researched for over 75 years, and water fluoridation has been proven to reduce decay by 40 to 60 percent.

## Food and drink

Fluoride tends to get concentrated into many popular items that you will find in your supermarket trolley.

Everything from tea and coffee to potatoes and grapes contains some level of fluoride, although the amount is so low that any effect will be minimal.

## Fluoride varnish

Children living in poorer areas where the water supplies are not fluoridated can have five times more decay than children living in more affluent or fluoridated areas.

Research suggests that adding fluoride to the water is the best way of reducing these 'dental inequalities'.

Your dentist or a member of the dental can apply fluorides to your teeth. These come as varnishes or gels and are more concentrated than ones you can purchase yourself, so you do not need them as often. Some adults can also benefit from these applications.

Fluoride varnishes can help to reduce tooth decay – especially for people with dry mouth.

With fluoride toothpaste, and a few natural top-ups along the way, your teeth will receive all the protection they need to stay strong and healthy.





# Dry January – the relationship between alcohol and oral health

Giving up alcohol for Dry January has some unexpected benefits for your pearly whites, so here are some ways alcohol can damage your teeth to encourage you to hop on the wagon.

“The best way for somebody to protect themselves from alcohol-related disease is to drink moderately, both in volume and frequency.

Dr Nigel Carter, Chief Executive of the Oral Health Foundation

## What is Dry January?

Introduced by Alcohol Change UK, Dry January is a public health campaign that encourages people to give up alcohol for 31 days. An unexpected benefit from Dry January for many people is the changes it can make to your mouth. Here are a few ways quitting alcohol can help your oral health.

## Acidity

All alcoholic drinks are acidic, but some drinks contain more acid than others. Wines, spirits, and beers are especially acidic. The most common acids found in wine are citric acid, tartaric acid, and malic acid.

Do not brush your teeth for one hour after drinking acidic alcoholic drinks. The acid loosens particles of the enamel, during this period, so if you brush too soon, you could be brushing away softened surface which can lead to enamel erosion.

## Sugar content

The sweeter the wine or alcohol tastes, the more sugar it contains. Alcopops are the worst offenders, but beers, wines, and liqueurs are also often filled with sugars.

The plaque (bacteria) in our mouths feeds on sugar and then produces plaque acids, which will then lead to decay. Decay, if left untreated, can lead to demineralisation of the enamel, which is the loss of minerals from the tooth which keep the enamel strong.

Decay in the early stages can be easily treated, but if left too long, the tooth will need to be filled.

## Staining

It is fairly well known that red wine stains your teeth, but highly-coloured beers, coffee liqueur, and some cocktails are all guilty of staining teeth. Lots of people notice a difference in their confidence and satisfaction with their smiles when their teeth have some staining, and that can lead to lasting effects on your mental health.

If you like a glass of red wine every now and again, it is even more important to clean your teeth properly, but remember to wait an hour before brushing. Combining less alcohol with a better oral hygiene routine will keep the natural colour of your teeth and help make sure that they remain unstained and healthy.

One of the benefits of going to see a hygienist is that they are trained and experienced at polishing your teeth, which can help remove stains. You might be

surprised with how white a professional clean can make your teeth!

## Dehydration

Dehydration is known to decrease the saliva flow your mouth produces and leads to a dry mouth. Anyone who has felt thirst will have noticed this dry mouth feeling.

Because alcohol is a diuretic, meaning it also encourages you to urinate as it pulls the excess water from your blood, it puts you at a higher risk of becoming dehydrated.

A dry mouth can cause lots of oral health problems. This includes dry lips, bad breath, loss of taste, recurrent mouth infections (like oral thrush), build-up of secretions and can make tooth decay, and gum disease worse.

## Mouth cancer

Drinking alcohol to excess increases your risk of mouth cancer. Alcohol is linked to just under a third (30%) of all mouth cancers.

Signs of mouth cancer include red or white patches, particularly if they are changing size or shape, ulcers that do not heal within three weeks, a hoarse voice, and any lumps or swelling in the mouth and throat area.

If you have any of these symptoms for three weeks or longer, then please visit your dentist or doctor, to have this checked out. You may need to be referred to a specialist for further tests.

If it is mouth cancer, then the earlier it is caught, the better the outcome will be.



If you think you might be dependent on alcohol, visit this [website](#) and then please consult a doctor so they can help you quit safely.

# Excess alcohol consumption is extremely harmful for overall health.

Many people do not realise the effect alcohol can have on their health and general wellbeing.

Learn more by clicking on the link below.

[www.dentalhealth.org/drugs-alcohol-and-your-oral-health](http://www.dentalhealth.org/drugs-alcohol-and-your-oral-health)

# New year's resolutions to keep your mouth healthy

A trap many of us fall into is setting targets that are perhaps a little too ambitious but working towards better oral health is a great example of something you can do to improve your overall health with little to no effort.

There are plenty of small changes you can make to your day-to-day routine that are not too taxing but can go a long way to helping you get a healthier smile.

## Drink more water

Upping your water intake can really work wonders for your health in plenty of ways, including weight loss and boosting energy, but it also is really good for your mouth.

Since it does not cause tooth decay, erosion, or gum disease, in fact having a glass of water after eating or drinking anything can help to neutralise the plaque acids that can cause erosion and decay.

It is a brilliant, tooth-friendly, healthy drink alternative to things like sodas and fruit juices. It will also tackle morning breath, keep you hydrated, and if it is fluoridated then it can actually make your enamel stronger. Wins all around!

## Chew sugar-free gum

We all know chewing gum helps freshen your breath, but not many people realise it can actually help protect your teeth and gums between meals. Saliva is the mouth's natural defence against acid and chewing gum for just 20 minutes encourages the mouth to produce more saliva, helping keep oral health issues at bay and your breath smelling fresh. Just make sure it is sugar-free, and extra points if it contains Xylitol.

## Spit don't rinse

This can take some getting used to, but it is a habit that will really help your teeth stay healthy.

When you have finished brushing your teeth, with fluoride toothpaste, spit out the excess toothpaste but don't rinse your mouth. Part of the benefit of brushing with fluoride toothpaste is what happens after you have put down your toothbrush. Refraining



from rinsing allows the fluoride to remain on your teeth for longer, providing you with extra protection throughout the day. Avoiding eating or drinking for 30 minutes after brushing will also mean that the fluoride is protecting your teeth for even longer.

## Clean between your teeth

No matter how all-singing-all-dancing your toothbrush is, it can only reach around 60% of your tooth surfaces. The other 40% is in-between your teeth. These tight spaces in between your teeth are not areas that your toothbrush can reach. So, each day, use an interdental brush or floss to clean those nooks and crannies. Doing this will reduce your risk of gum disease and bad breath.

If you are susceptible to cavities between your teeth, one extra step further would be putting a dab of fluoride toothpaste on your floss or interdental brushes to get that fluoride goodness into the areas at risk.

## Always check food labels

So much of the food and drink we buy contains much more sugar than we realise. Before you put things in your basket, take a second to have a look at the label and check what you are actually putting into your body. Remember, seeing 'no added sugar' doesn't mean something is sugar-free, and adults shouldn't be having more than 30g of sugar in a day.

## Read up on mouth cancer

Last but by no means least, learning how to spot mouth cancer is something we should all make a priority. It is a deadly disease that does not discriminate, it can affect any one of us. Knowing your stuff when it comes to mouth cancer saves lives; it could save yours. So, the next time you get a chance, spend just five minutes online reading about the disease at [www.mouthcancer.org](http://www.mouthcancer.org). There you can learn about the key warning signs and risk factors.



# WORD OF MOUTH

## Magazine

We want to know what sort of content you want to see!

Would you like to know more about gum disease? How about a Q&A with one of our dental experts to answer some of your burning questions? Or perhaps you want to hear more about our fantastic range of educational resources?

Let us know by emailing [pr@dentalhealth.org](mailto:pr@dentalhealth.org)



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Foundation**  
Better oral health for all