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Teeth Brushing

Brushing your teeth is an essential part of self-care. It is recommended that children should brush their teeth twice a day, once in the evening and at one other time during the day. This should be incorporated into the child's daily routine.

The NHS recommends that children should be assisted and/or supervised until at least 7 years of age.

Some children experience barriers to brushing teeth which if not addressed can result in tooth decay and dental problems. We have listed some of the common barriers children come across below with some strategies that may help.

Time

It is recommended that teeth should be brushed for a minimum of 2 minutes, cleaning all of the surfaces of the teeth. If the length of time brushing is an issue, there are many products that are available to help monitor the time that teeth are being brushed these include;

- Apps can be downloaded for free which can time the length of time brushing (e.g. Brush DJ)
- Toothbrushes that either light up or play music for 2 minutes are available
- 2-minute sand timers.



Taste

If your child has difficulty tolerating strong tastes and this is affecting teeth brushing there are many different flavours that are widely available to purchase from shops. OraNurse makes a flavourless, foamless toothpaste which is available to purchase online or you may be able to purchase a similar product from your dentist.



Co-ordination

Brushing teeth requires both proprioception and co-ordination skills. If your child has difficulty with either of these they may find this task quite challenging. This can result in difficulties opening and squeezing the toothpaste onto the brush, applying the right amount of pressure when brushing, being able to grip the brush and being able to move the brush in the right direction to reach the areas needed. Some strategies that may help are;

- Use a flip cap toothpaste to assist with opening
- Pump action toothpaste/ toothpaste squeezer can be used to help apply toothpaste



- Electric indicator toothbrushes are available which can indicate too much pressure, alternatively checking to toothbrush regularly can indicate if too much pressure is being used as the bristles will break down quickly
- 3 sided brushes can be used to ensure all surfaces are being reached.



- Use foam tubing on the handle to make it easier to grip
- Guide the child's hand when brushing so they can feel the movement needed.



- Observe the child when they are brushing, are they able to complete the hand movements required to brush their teeth properly? Identify the areas that the child is having difficulty with, focus on practicing one area at a time with you starting the task completing the areas they find most difficult and the child finishing the task completing the areas they can complete and the one area they are working on. Once they have mastered an area move onto the next with you reducing the input you put in.

Sensory

For some children it is the feeling of brushing their teeth that they have difficulty tolerating. If this is the case there are different things that may help, you could try;

- Using an electric toothbrush can sometimes help to desensitise the mouth
- Dipping the toothbrush in warm water
- Experiment with different types of bristles on the toothbrush e.g. soft, medium or silicone
- Use a three sided brush – this can reduce the amount of time brushing



Tips

- Encourage your child to spit after brushing
- Do not rinse after brushing as this removes the fluoride.
- Use a mirror so the child can see where the brush is cleaning their teeth
- Children do not need to use special children's toothpaste, children of all ages can use any toothpaste providing it contains between 1350-1500ppm of fluoride (check the label). Children under 3 years require just a smear or toothpaste and children 3-6 years require a pea sized amount.
- More information on looking after your child's teeth can be found on the Designed to Smile website. <https://www.designedtosmile.org/info/>

