



Länsi-Uudenmaan hyvinvointialue
Västra Nylands välfärdsområde
Western Uusimaa Wellbeing Services County

Oral Health Care for Children Aged 0–3

It is important to incorporate dental care into your child's daily routine. As guardians, you play a pivotal role in shaping your child's future dental habits and attitudes towards oral hygiene. Daily and thorough oral hygiene practices are essential for maintaining your child's oral health.

Did you know that newborns do not have the cavity-causing bacteria, *Streptococcus mutans*, present in their mouths? To prevent this bacterium from taking hold, avoid saliva contact. This means for example, ensuring the child uses separate utensils. When adult caregivers maintain good oral health and use xylitol regularly, it further reduces the risk of this bacterium adhering to the child's teeth.

Teeth typically begin to erupt around six months, with all 20 baby teeth usually in place by the age of three. The sequence of teeth eruption can vary from child to child.

Breastfeeding

- Breastfeeding supports jaw growth and the proper development of biting muscles.
- Frequent and prolonged breastfeeding (beyond 18 months) or bottle-feeding, especially between meals and at night, can increase the risk of cavities.
- For children breastfed beyond 18 months, diligent daily oral care is essential for maintaining oral health.

Regular mealtimes and water for thirst

- **Teach your child to adhere to regular mealtimes.** Habitual snacking is harmful for the teeth.
 - Most foods and beverages contain carbohydrates that produce tooth-decaying acids. **Teeth can endure such acid attacks up to five or six times a day.**
 - You should not make your child accustomed to sugar. Delay introducing sugary foods for as long as possible.
- **Water is the best drink to quench thirst.** Note that drinkable dairy products should be served during meals and not between them. Refrain from offering your child juice or other sugary drinks for thirst.
- Using **full-xylitol** products reduces the duration of post-meal acid attack and decreases the number of cavity-causing bacteria. An example of good practice is the use of xylitol products at the end of meals. The recommended daily dose of xylitol is at least 5 grams. The amount is obtained from 6-10 chewing gums or pastilles. The child can start practising using chewable full xylitol tablets as soon as the child is able to chew food and tablets. It is good for small children to chew the tablet under supervision and in a sitting position. To avoid stomach issues, gradually start giving the child one tablet per day, for example. However, remember that xylitol is not a replacement for brushing teeth.

Pacifiers and Finger Sucking

- When selecting a pacifier for your child, the anatomical “flat” design is the best choice for dental health. Pacifiers are preferable to finger sucking in terms of bite development.
- **It is a good idea to give up the pacifier before the child turns 2 years old.** Prolonged pacifier use can lead to malocclusion (overbite) and delayed speech development. It is recommended to remove the pacifier when the child is vocalizing and, in that way, practising speech.

How to brush a child's teeth

- **Begin brushing once the first tooth appears, using a soft, child-sized toothbrush.** You can transition to an electric toothbrush as soon as the child feels comfortable with it. To ensure safety, the child's teeth should be brushed by a parent when using an electric toothbrush.
- **Brush the child's teeth for two minutes twice a day.** Apply a tiny smear of fluoride toothpaste (containing 1000–1100 ppm fluoride). Focus especially on the gum lines and chewing surfaces.
- As the child grows, they will want to try brushing on their own. However, an adult should assist with brushing until the child is about 10 years old.

Sources: www.kaypahoito.fi, www.terveysportti.fi

