



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

# **Oral care guide for expecting families**

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## Oral care for expecting families

Pregnancy is a unique experience for each family. It is a good idea to examine and, if necessary, change the family's health habits and create a healthy growth environment for the child already during pregnancy.



A healthy mouth is part of general health, wellbeing and quality of life. Children's oral and dental care begins already during pregnancy by establishing good food and oral care habits in the family.

It is important that your child's dental care becomes part of their daily habits. As guardians, you have the opportunity to influence your child's future dental routines and attitudes towards dental care.

The mother's susceptibility to oral diseases may increase during pregnancy. The mother's hormone activity changes and may affect the composition of saliva and the susceptibility of gums to inflammation. Nausea in pregnancy and frequent snacking may increase the risk of cavities. If you have undergone regular dental examinations, you do not need to seek dental care especially because of pregnancy.

You play the key role in the prevention of cavities and other oral diseases! Together with oral health care personnel, you can maintain good oral health that promotes good general health.

## Assessment of the oral health status and need for care of families expecting their first child

Parents expecting their first child have the opportunity for a free assessment of oral health and need for treatment by a dental health care professional. During the visit, you will discuss individual oral care needs and get advice. If necessary, the professional may refer you to paid oral health care services for adults after the guidance visit.

## **By following the oral care recommendations, you promote the good health of your whole family**

Cavities, i.e., dental caries, are one of the most common infectious diseases in humans. The development of caries depends on the number of bacteria present in the mouth, the diet and the characteristics of saliva and dental tissue. You can influence many of these factors yourself and thus prevent the formation of cavities.

The *Streptococcus mutans* bacterium that causes cavities often spreads to the child from their parents. The bacterium is transmitted through saliva, for example when using the same spoon. It is important to note that early caries infection increases the susceptibility to cavities in the child's primary teeth and even permanent teeth.

No *Streptococcus mutans* caries is present in the mouth of a newborn, but it can be transmitted to the child through the saliva immediately after their first tooth has emerged. When the parents' teeth and oral health are in good condition, their child has a lower risk of caries infection.

Cavities can be prevented by regular self-care, i.e., cleaning the teeth and the mouth, and a healthy diet. Cavities are more likely to occur if the diet is high in sugar and the daily self-care is not sufficient.

Almost all foods contain sugar, from which caries bacteria form acid that dissolves tooth enamel. This event is called an acid attack. If there are several acid attacks during the day, the tooth surface does not have time to harden again, and a cavity will begin to form on the tooth surface.

Inflammation of the gums, i.e., gingivitis, occurs if bacterial plaque accumulates on the tooth surface. Gingivitis caused by dental plaque is common in both children and adults. Due to changes in hormone activity due to pregnancy, gums may become more susceptible to infection. However, you should keep in mind that poor oral hygiene increases the risk of developing gingivitis also during pregnancy, meaning that maintaining good oral hygiene also prevents the development of gingivitis during pregnancy.

## Use fluoride toothpaste and favour xylitol

Fluoride reduces cavity formation by preventing bacteria from dissolving the minerals in the enamel. In addition, fluoride hardens the tooth surface. Fluoride also prevents the metabolism of caries bacteria and the production of acids. Select a toothpaste containing fluoride for yourself and your child.

The infant's mother and later the child's xylitol product use seems to prevent or at least delay the child's infection with *Streptococcus mutans* caries bacteria. Full xylitol chewing gum or tablet shortens the acid attack and increases saliva secretion and rinses the surfaces of the teeth. 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. Xylitol never replaces the need for brushing teeth.

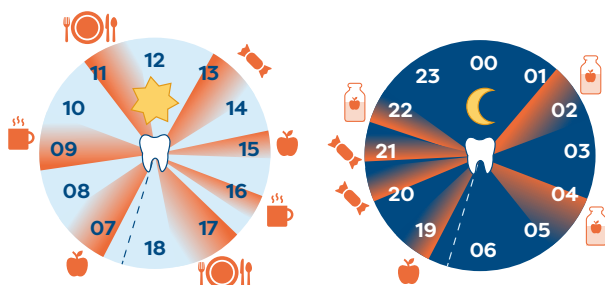
The child can start practising using chewable full xylitol tablets as soon as the child is able to chew food and tablets. It is good for small children to chew the tablet under supervision and in a sitting position. To avoid stomach issues, gradually start giving the child one tablet per day, for example.



## Have a regular meal schedule

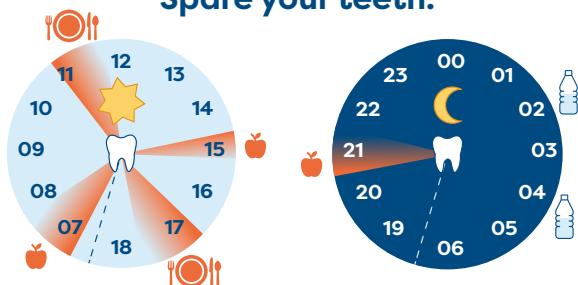
Caries can be prevented by avoiding sugary foods and drinks and by eating regularly. This means avoiding snacking and eating sugary treats with meals. Water is the best option when thirsty. It is also important to note that drinkable dairy products should be part of meals.

Your family should get used to regular meal and snack schedules already during pregnancy. All eating and drinking should take place just 5–6 times a day due to acid attacks. The mouth needs 3–4 hours of rest between meals in order for saliva to rinse the teeth and repair damage caused by acid.



Constantly snacking and drinking causes hours of acid attack on the teeth.

### Spare your teeth.



Schedule sweet/sour drinks and treats in conjunction with meals.

Original picture: Finnish Dental Association

Dental erosion is the chemical dissolution of the tooth surface due to the action of acids without the presence of bacteria. When the surface of the tooth is soft, it is prone to wear due to chewing, for example. Erosion is caused by frequently consumed light drinks, sports and energy drinks, flavoured waters, full juices, berry juices, citrus fruits and vinegar.

## **Brush teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste**

Cavities and gingivitis can be prevented by cleaning the teeth and the mouth regularly.

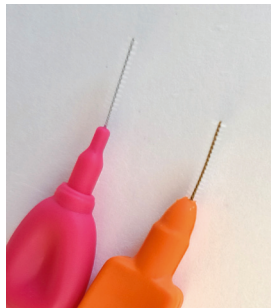
In gingivitis, gums bleed when cleaning the teeth, and the mouth may smell or taste unpleasant. This is due to the bacterial plaque accumulated on the tooth surface. Gingivitis is usually healed by improving self-care.

Oral health affects overall health. A bacterial infection spreading from the mouth may increase the risk of arteriosclerosis and myocardial or cerebral infarction. In addition, oral infections can impair the therapeutic equilibrium of many chronic diseases, such as rheumatoid arthritis and diabetes.

Brushing your teeth with fluoride toothpaste in the morning and evening will make your mouth feel clean, and at the same time, provide a good fluoride protection for your teeth. The use of an electric toothbrush is recommended for everyone. For adults, the recommended fluoride content of toothpaste is 1450–1500 ppm. Brush your teeth for at least two minutes. Pay particular attention to gum lines and the occlusal surfaces of your back teeth. During this time, the fluoride can bind to the tooth, strengthening the surface of the tooth, i.e., the enamel. You do not need to rinse your mouth with water during brushing or after brushing. Just spit out any superfluous saliva-toothpaste mixture.

## **Clean between your teeth**

It is a good idea to clean between your teeth with an interdental brush, brush pick or floss.



## **Breastfeeding and nutrition**

Breastfeeding has many positive effects on the health of both the mother and the child. The child has a natural need to nurse, and breastfeeding is beneficial for the healthy development of their mouth and teeth. Breastfeeding stimulates the growth of the jaws and the optimal development of the masticatory muscles.

Repetitive breastfeeding that continues after the age of 18 months or bottle feeding in between mealtimes and at night can expose their teeth to caries. The defence mechanisms provided by saliva are at their weakest at night. Careful daily oral hygiene plays a key role in maintaining a good oral health for the child.

Regular mealtimes and drinking water when thirsty are good for the child's oral health. You should not give your child juice or other sugary drinks when they are thirsty. Your child does not crave sugar naturally. You should not condition your child to use sugar, and you should postpone the provision of sweets as long as possible. When sweets are served, this should be done in connection with meals so that sugar does not harm the teeth as much.

## **Suckling upon a pacifier or fingers**

If your child needs a pacifier, an anatomical “flat” model is the best option for teeth. A pacifier is a better option than suckling upon a finger for the development of bite.

It is a good idea to give up the pacifier before the child turns 2 years old. Long-term use of the pacifier may cause issues with the bite and slow down speech development. It is a good idea to take the pacifier out of the child's mouth whenever they make sounds and practise speaking in this way. It is much easier to wean your child off the pacifier before the “terrible twos” when the child becomes independent. You should not teach your child to use the pacifier continuously.

## Teething

The first teeth usually emerge at the age of approximately 4-7 months. A total of 20 primary teeth emerge, and they usually emerge in the mouth by approximately 3 years of age. There may be individual differences in the order in which the teeth emerge.

Symptoms of teething include heavy saliva secretion, swelling of gums, restlessness, eating difficulties, and the child may constantly put their fingers in their mouth. Your child might prefer cold foods and finger foods when teething.

Teething is a risky time in terms of infection with *Streptococcus mutans* caries bacteria. The child can get infected when their first tooth has emerged. To prevent bacterial transmission, avoid saliva contact with the child. It is easiest if you do not kiss your child on the mouth, rinse the pacifier under water, and your child always has their own cutlery.

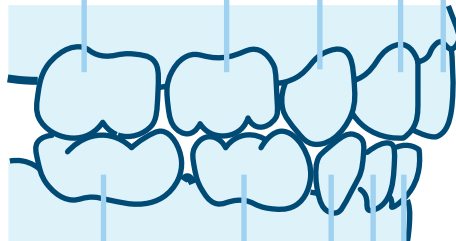
### Order of primary teeth emerging

#### Upper jaw

|                 |                     |
|-----------------|---------------------|
| First incisors  | 7 to 12 months old  |
| Second incisors | 7 to 15 months old  |
| Canines         | 14 to 23 months old |
| First molars    | 12 to 18 months old |
| Second molars   | 26 to 34 months old |

#### Lower jaw

|                 |                     |
|-----------------|---------------------|
| Second molars   | 20 to 33 months old |
| First molars    | 12 to 18 months old |
| Canines         | 14 to 24 months old |
| Second incisors | 8 to 16 months old  |
| First incisors  | 4 to 10 months old  |



## Brushing your child's teeth

Oral and dental health is a common cause for the whole family. Parents always serve as examples for their child.

Brushing should be started as soon as the first tooth emerges.

- To remove the bacterial plaque, brush their teeth twice a day with a soft toothbrush intended for children.
- Use fluoride toothpaste (1000–1100 ppm) twice a day for children aged between 0 and 3. Do not rinse the toothpaste off.
- Emerging and freshly emerged teeth require fluoride so that the enamel hardens. When used correctly, fluoride toothpaste is safe for everyone.
- You can start using an electric toothbrush as soon as the child agrees to it. A parent should brush their child's teeth to ensure safe brushing with an electric toothbrush.
- As the child grows up, they will want to practice brushing their teeth on their own. However, it is important to note that an adult must check the brushing results until the age of 10.



## Children's oral health examinations

Oral health examinations are carried out for children several times before they go to school, and more frequent examinations are possible according to individual needs. Your child will receive an invitation to book an appointment to oral health examinations.

Before going to school, children are invited to an oral health examination at the ages of 1, 3 and 5. Oral health care services are free of charge for people under the age of 18.

## More information



Western Uusimaa Wellbeing Services County, oral health care  
([www.luvn.fi/en/](http://www.luvn.fi/en/))

## Sources

[www.kaypahoito.fi/en/](http://www.kaypahoito.fi/en/)  
[www.terveysportti.fi](http://www.terveysportti.fi) (in Finnish)

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