

# Dental Health

## *A Leaflet for Parents*

There are two commonly occurring dental diseases:

### **Dental Decay**

This is a disease in which bacteria on the tooth surfaces ferment sugar in the diet to make acid. This attacks the hard outer casing of the tooth called the enamel. When this has a hole in it, the bacteria move in and start to destroy the softened underlying dentine. At this point the tooth may begin to hurt.

This is mainly a disease of the young.

### **Gum Disease**

This occurs when bacteria on the teeth cause the gum to become red and inflamed. If left unchecked the bone under the gum starts to disappear, allowing the teeth to become mobile. Often bad breath is a feature at this stage.

This is the main cause of tooth loss in adult life, BUT it often begins in childhood.

***Both are Preventable!***

## Teeth and the PKU Diet

Your child has a disorder which involves a diet that is higher than average in sugar. This leaflet will explain ways in which you can help to minimise the dental problems that sugar can cause.

- Encourage your child to eat sweets with meals rather than over a period of time between meals.
- Aspartame-free fizzy drinks, squashes or fruit juices are suitable but these can harm teeth in two ways. The sugar in them can cause decay and the acid in fizzy drinks and pure fruit juices can gradually wear the tooth in a process called erosion. Low calorie and sugar free drinks usually contain aspartame and are NOT suitable for your child. As the protein substitutes (and squashes) are sweet, they are best consumed at meal times.
- Encourage your child to complete drinks in one go rather than sipping over a long period of time. Drinking with a straw may be beneficial. This also applies to the glucose polymer supplements.
- Any drink, other than water, taken at night is potentially dentally harmful.
- Avoid prolonged bottle feeding of the protein substitute as this can be harmful to teeth.
- Finish meals with fruit.

## How to Brush

- Your child should brush their teeth twice a day - in the morning and last thing at night. A size 2 brush for those under 4 years old and a 3 or 3.5 for the older child.
- Your child should use only a small pea-sized amount of a fluoride toothpaste. There are special brands for the under sevens which are less strongly flavoured and contain the correct amount of fluoride for this age group.
- You should start cleaning a baby's teeth as soon as they erupt. You will need to supervise brushing until children are at least seven years old, but it is important to encourage them to clean their own teeth.

# Visits to the Dentist

These should be every 4-6 months. It is never too early to take your child to the dentist. Go along when the teeth begin to erupt for advice.

## Check-up

This will include:

- Monitoring the standard of oral hygiene and offering other relevant preventive advice or treatment.
- Looking for early or established holes in the teeth.
- Checking for early signs of gum disease.
- Checking for misplaced or irregular teeth and deciding when, or if, these should be treated.

## Fluoride

This hardens teeth making them less likely to get holes and helps arrest very early decay.

The best preventive measure of all is fluoride in your water supply which reduces decay levels by one half.

If your local water supply is not fluoridated use a fluoride toothpaste and ask your dentist whether fluoride drops or tablets would be appropriate.

(Endekay tablets and Fluoridrops are aspartame-free)

## Fissure Sealant

This is a coating applied to back teeth which lowers the rate of decay on the chewing surfaces. It is easily applied by a dentist or hygienist. The first, and most important, teeth to benefit erupt at about 6 years old. It is a simple procedure, but the tooth does have to be kept dry!

## Sporty children

Sadly lots of accidents to front teeth happen in the play ground or while playing sports on a casual basis. However, if your child plays a contact sport regularly, then ask your dentist to make a mouthguard to protect the front teeth.

## Orthodontics

Childhood is the ideal time for irregular teeth to be straightened. This may involve extractions and removable or fixed braces over a period of at least two years. It can be hard to maintain enthusiasm but the results are well worthwhile.

## Remember

Dental decay rates in children are dropping but there is still no room for complacency. You can help guide your child towards maintaining their own good dental health.

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### The National Society for Phenylketonuria (United Kingdom)

The Society is a registered charity. It offers support to PKUs and their families by producing various publications including a quarterly newsletter, organising formal and informal meetings and conferences.

Further information and details can be obtained by contacting:

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