

GOOD Bite

for childcare
staff

Dental Health



Dental health is important especially when it comes to tooth enamel and this applies to both baby teeth and permanent teeth. Note that baby teeth have a thinner enamel layer than permanent teeth.

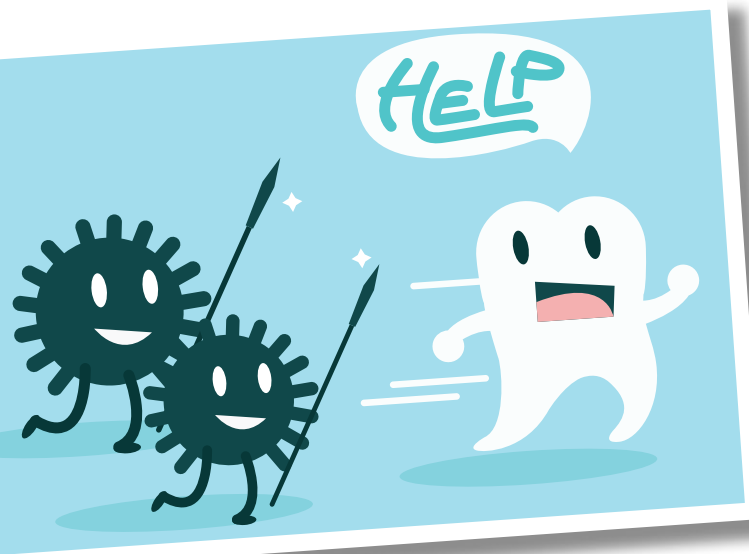
Tooth decay and dental erosion are major causes of concern as they damage tooth enamel.



Tooth decay

Some ways to help prevent tooth decay in children

- Avoid or limit sweet or sticky food such as lollies, fruit bars, muesli bars, sugary drinks, cake and dried fruit
- Quench thirst with tap water as it contains fluoride, bottled water does not. Fluoride helps strengthen tooth enamel. There is nothing in tap water to harm teeth
- Avoid 'grazing' throughout the day. Try to have regular eating times to reduce the number of times bacteria are active and causing damage. Allow up to two hours between meal times and other eating occasions (morning and afternoon tea) to give tooth enamel time to 'recover'
- Whether at home or in child care, if it is necessary to eat more regularly, choose tooth friendly food. These include dairy foods, salad vegetables or vegetable platters
- After eating, rinse with water ('Swish and Swallow') to help reduce acidity in the mouth
- Finishing a meal with milk or cheese will also help to protect teeth as dairy foods contain casein. This is a protein that acts as a buffer against damaging acid in the mouth.



What is the difference between tooth decay and dental erosion?

Tooth decay occurs when the bacteria in the mouth feed on sugar (from food) and produce acid. The acid damages tooth surface by dissolving it.

The more often you have sugary food or drink, the more time acid will be on the tooth surface and this can cause tooth decay.

Dental erosion is the loss of tooth enamel caused by acid attacks that come directly from food or drink. Erosion usually shows up as hollows in the teeth and a general wearing away of the tooth surface and biting edge.

Dental erosion

Some ways to help prevent dental erosion

- Avoid or limit acidic drinks such as soft drinks (including diet or sugar free soft drinks), sports drinks, cordials, fruit drinks and fruit juices (especially citrus juices)
- Choose fresh fruit instead of fruit juice. The fibre in fruit helps to buffer the effect of fruit acid
- If serving juice, limit to one small glass a day and have with a meal so that food buffers the acid in juice. Drink using a straw as this will reduce (but not eliminate) contact with teeth
- If providing fruit at morning or afternoon tea time, serve with tooth friendly e.g. Vegetables, plain milk or yoghurt and cheese
- After having fruit or drink other than milk or water, rinse with water ('Swish and Swallow')
- Quench thirst with tap water

Note: Saliva helps to prevent erosion from acid but if consumption of acid drinks is high, saliva provides limited protection.

What about brushing teeth?

- Start cleaning baby's teeth when first tooth comes through (about 6 months)
- Brush at least twice a day with one of those times being bedtime
- Up to 18 months, use a small, soft toothbrush with water only (no toothpaste)
- From 18 months, clean children's teeth with a small amount of low dose fluoride toothpaste (placed on toothbrush by an adult)



- Spit toothpaste out (do not swallow) and don't rinse
- Help with tooth brushing until about eight years of age
- Don't brush straight after eating or drinking as tooth enamel will have been softened and needs time to recover – at least 30 minutes. Up to one hour after acidic food or drink.
- Use a soft toothbrush and ask a dentist or dental hygienist how to brush teeth properly
- Children should have their teeth checked at all child health visits (see Blue Book) and a dental check up by a dental professional by their first birthday.

What about Infant feeding squeeze pouches?

Occasional use of these items may be convenient but don't use regularly as:

- Baby is not learning to eat from a spoon (oral skills)
- Motor skills such as learning to use a spoon, may be delayed
- Baby doesn't learn how 'real' food looks or smells

- The flavour of individual foods may be 'masked' by other ingredients
- Regular use may lead to pickiness when it comes to eating 'actual' food
- Nutritional value may be diluted

AND

- There may be an increased risk of tooth decay. This is because of the sugar levels (that can be higher than natural fruit). The pureed food from the pouch can sit around teeth and gums and this can lead to tooth decay.

Thanks to Leeann Mullen, Oral Health Central Coast Local Health district for input in this edition of the Goodbite



Contact Us!

This fact sheet is produced by the Central Coast Public Health/Community Nutrition Team. If you have any suggestions or nutrition topics you would like covered please contact us by telephone on 4320 3691 or fax on 4320 2828.