

2. When swallowing is difficult

- To help prevent aspiration – breathing in of water when brushing, tilt the head forwards.
- Use a low-foaming toothpaste e.g. Sensodyne Pronamel, Biotene.

Children who are fed via a feeding tube

There is still a need to think about the health of the mouth for these children.

- Toothbrushing is just as important for children who are tube-fed because:
 - » It makes the mouth feel comfortable; mouths only feel comfortable when they are clean.
 - » The plaque bacteria can cause chest infections.
 - » Bad breath is often caused by food stagnation.
 - » If the feeding tube is temporary, the good habit is already in place when oral feeding starts again.

Grinding

This problem is very difficult to stop and can lead to tooth wear.

- Massaging the mouth and cheeks for relaxation may be successful.
- Soft or hard acrylic splints may be suggested by your dentist.

Sore mouths

Mouths may be sore because of poor oral hygiene, viral, fungal or bacterial infection, or trauma. This can lead to distress and poor eating.

- Keep the mouth as clean as possible as unclean mouths can lead to more discomfort.
- The cause of the soreness needs to be identified, so a dentist should be consulted.
- Chlorhexidine spray or mouthwash on a sponge is antibacterial and can reduce secondary infection. Beware of staining on the teeth. The dentist should be consulted.
- Anti-fungal treatments can be prescribed by your dentist if this is the cause of the problem.

Seeing the dentist

- It is very important for children with extra needs to see a dentist regularly, starting from the time the first teeth appear. Your dentist may suggest your child sees a specialist.
- Many local health areas have specialist dental services for children with extra needs. They can help with preventing dental problems and with treatment.



If you require information in accessing NHS dental services in Devon, please call 0845 002 0034

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Looking after teeth for children with extra needs



Additional information for parents / carers

www.healthyteethdevon.nhs.uk

Other formats

If you need this information in another format such as audio tape or computer disc, Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language, please telephone the PALS desk on 01271 314090.

When brushing is a struggle – some tips

- Choose a small, medium toothbrush. Start early on so that your child is used to having something in their mouth.
- Use a smear of family fluoride toothpaste for under threes, and a pea-sized blob for those aged three – six years.



Position

- A small child may be cradled in the arms.
- Brushing can be done standing behind the child with the head supported or from a seated or kneeling position.
- It takes two people to brush teeth sometimes – one to brush while the other distracts, holds hands or encourages.



Some simple aids for brushing

- A bicycle handlebar grip or foam tubing placed on a toothbrush handle, with a piece of elastic around it, can make it easier to hold.

- Two brushes taped back to back can make a good prop to keep the mouth open.
- A “Superbrush” or “Collis Curve” may help to clean several tooth surfaces at once. They can be obtained on the internet.
- Pump-operated toothpaste dispensers and tube squeezers may help a child put toothpaste on the brush.



If brushing causes distress

- A different area of the mouth can be brushed at different times.
- Other distractions such as music or a TV can be used.
- Brushing teeth in the bath may be easier.
- Choose a time when the child is relaxed.
- Show toothbrushing using a mirror or on a sibling, parent / carer or teddy.
- Reward schemes (eg star charts with treats at the end of the week).
- Build up gradually with dry brush to begin with, then a smear of their favourite toothpaste, and then increase the amount.

A strong tongue or tight lips

- Massaging the lips and cheek before toothbrushing may relax the child’s lips.
- A flannel or handkerchief wrapped round the forefinger may be used to gently retract or hold back the tongue / lips.

Gagging, retching or clamping

- Start brushing from the front and clean as much at the back of the mouth as the child will allow.
- If your child clamps on the toothbrush leave it in as a prop and use a second brush to clean the teeth you can reach.
- Changing the body position, brushing at a different time of day, or using a smaller brush may reduce these problems.
- A conventional finger guard made of hard plastic may be useful.
- Applying pressure as in the picture below can relieve the gag reflex in some cases.



Problems with swallowing

1. When the mouth is sensitive

- Massage round the mouth and cheeks to improve muscle tone, mobility and saliva flow, and to desensitise the area.
- Introduce a small toothbrush gradually to reduce hypersensitivity, ready for proper brushing.
- Play activities can help mouth function, for example mouth toys, blowing instruments or using a straw.