

How to brush your teeth

Good toothbrushing is an essential part of maintaining healthy teeth and gums. Brushing can be done using a manual toothbrush or an electric toothbrush.

- Brush twice a day for 2 minutes using a fluoride toothpaste.
- The most important time to brush is at bed time and at one other time during the day.
- Use a pea sized amount of toothpaste on a dry toothbrush.
- Spit the toothpaste out at the end of brushing and **do not** rinse your mouth out afterwards with water or mouth wash. The fluoride in the toothpaste keeps on working to protect your teeth if not washed away.

Children need help and supervision with brushing until the age of 7 and sometimes longer depending on need and dexterity.

A correct brushing technique is needed for which ever toothbrush type you are using.

It doesn't matter if you start on the upper or lower teeth or the left or right but does require you to cover all surfaces. Brushing needs a slow methodical approach.

Don't brush hard, use a light pressure, this allows the bristles to move freely and take on the shape of the neck of the teeth at the gum line and flick between the teeth to remove plaque and food debris.

The presence of plaque and food debris can, if left in place where the tooth and gum meet can cause the gums to bleed. This is a sign of gum disease. If you find you experience bleeding when you brush, don't stop brushing your teeth and gums! It is important to carry on as you need to remove the plaque and bacteria that cause the bleeding and then the bleeding will stop.

- You should replace your toothbrush every 3 months. If your toothbrush has become worn or has splayed bristles before 3 months, then it is likely that you are brushing too hard.
- Do not share tooth brushes!



Using a Manual Toothbrush

If using a manual toothbrush, choose a brush with soft or medium bristles, a flat surface to the bristles and a small head. A small headed toothbrush fits more easily to the back of your mouth and will allow you to be more accurate when brushing. The diagrams below go through the current recommended technique:

Bass technique – a toothbrushing technique to help avoid abrasion/tooth wear



1 Place bristles along the gum line at a 45 degree angle. Bristles should contact both the tooth surface and the gum line. Ideally toothbrush head should be smaller than the one seen in the picture



2 Gently brush the outer tooth surfaces of 2-3 teeth using a vibrating back forth and rolling action. Move brush to the next 2-3 teeth and repeat action



3 Maintain a 45 degree angle with toothbrush contacting tooth surface and gumline. Gently brush back using a back forth and rolling motion along the inside of all



4 Tilt brush vertically behind front teeth. Make several up and down strokes using the front half of the brush.



5 Place the brush against the biting surface of the teeth and use a gentle back and forth scrubbing motion. Brush the tongue from back to front to remove odour producing bacteria.

Dr Sujit, Brushing technique: Bass and modified bass method. Medchrome tube best medical videos <https://tube.medchrome.com> [online]

Using an Electric toothbrush

There are various types of powered brush on the market:

Battery powered toothbrushes

Battery powered brushes tend to be lower powered and the batteries need replacing regularly. Sometimes if the batteries are losing power the brush can make the right noises for working but the bristles might not be working effectively enough for good cleaning. Therefore we don't generally tend to recommend battery operated electric toothbrushes.



Rechargeable electric toothbrushes

You don't need the most expensive rechargeable electric toothbrush on the market to give the best clean however there are technique sensitive and do take a bit of getting used to initially but are more efficient at plaque removal than what you could do by hand. A rechargeable electric brush requires either a shaver socket or an adaptor for a plug socket to recharge them. We advise to keep on charge at all times especially for family use, to ensure that the brush is at its full power to provide the most effective clean.

Oscillating toothbrush



Sonic toothbrush

There are various brands of electric toothbrush such as Oral B Braun/Wisdom/Colgate and Philips. Look out for special offers in supermarkets, chemists and on-line. Aim to buy a mid-range rechargeable powered brush, don't spend more than £40.

You can use one handle for the whole family. Toothbrush heads generally come with colour-coded rings that can be allocated to each family member. Don't share toothbrush heads!

With an electric brush work in a methodical way start at the back of your mouth and be systematic working from one side to the other. Do the outside surfaces first, back along the biting surface then around the inside do this for both top and bottom teeth.

- Hold the brush so that the bristles are at a 45° angle to the gum margin
- Hold the brush head **still** on the tooth/gum margin for 3-5 seconds
- Slowly move from tooth to tooth in a rock-and-roll motion to get to grooves and crevices – **you don't need to do conventional brushing movements.**
- Brush for 2 minutes twice a day – especially just before you go to bed
- Use a toothpaste containing 1450ppm fluoride (3yrs+, <3yrs 1000ppm) on a dry brush
- Once you have brushed all surface, spit out the excess paste but **don't** rinse
- Brushing should take 2 minutes, some electric toothbrushes will have a built in 2-minute timer and give a slight stutter to the brushing movement and a change in tone, every 30 seconds.

Some added bonuses of using a rechargeable electric brush:

Some models come with pressure indicator feature. These usually have a light on the top of the handle that will light up red if you are putting too much pressure on the teeth. The tone of the brush can also change if excess pressure is applied to the tooth surface. This can help prevent against tooth surface loss.

The more expensive models come with wireless apps to help you monitor your brushing.

Don't share brush heads and replace brush heads every 3 months. Some brush heads have indicator bristles that fade from blue to white to remind you it is time to change the brush head.

Some brands offer a range of different brush heads to best suit your needs for example; orthodontic brush heads and tongue cleaning attachments etc.

You can find toothbrushing demonstrations on [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com) for Oral B Braun, Philips Sonicare, and Colgate brushes to help you with your brushing technique.



Brushing someone else's teeth who has additional needs

When brushing is a struggle – some tips

- Choose a small, medium textured toothbrush. Start early on so that he / she is used to having something in their mouth.
- Use a pea-sized amount of family fluoride toothpaste containing no less than 1350 ppm (value on back of tube).



Positioning

- Brushing can be done standing behind the person with the head supported or from a seated or kneeling position. It is much less threatening to stand behind or next to the patient rather than than standing in front of them.
- It takes two people to brush teeth sometimes – one to brush while the other distracts, holds hands or encourages.

Some simple aids that may assist with toothbrushing:



- 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 specialist toothbrush such as "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 him / her 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 person is relaxed.
- Can show toothbrushing using a mirror or on a sibling or carer.
- 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 his / her 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 person will allow.
- If he / she 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:



Patients who have problems with swallowing

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.

When swallowing is difficult:

- To help prevent aspiration – (breathing in of water) during brushing, tilt the head forwards.
- Use a low-foaming toothpaste e.g. Sensodyne Pronamel, Biotene extra., Oranurse etc. (speak to a dental professional about an ‘SLS FREE’ toothpaste).

Adults who are fed via a feeding tube

There is still a need to care for and think about the patients oral health needs for these adults. Toothbrushing is just as important for adults 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.
- 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. Try Massaging the mouth and cheeks for relaxation may be successful. The patients dentist may recommend a soft or hard acrylic splint or mouthguard to help.

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. Unclean mouths can lead to more discomfort.
- The cause of the soreness needs to be identified, so a dentist should be consulted as soon as possible.
- 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.

Visiting your Dentist

It is very important for adults with extra needs to see a dentist regularly. Your dentist may suggest he / she sees a specialist. Many local health areas have specialist dental services for adults with extra needs. They can help with preventing dental problems and with treatment. Please refer to the Salaried Dental Service tab which can be found on the home page of our website:

www.healthyteethdevon.nhs.uk

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