

Brushing Your Teeth



Barley Mow Dental Care

Why Clean Your Teeth?

The two most common dental problems - dental decay and gum disease are both caused by the action of bacteria on teeth or gums. Bacteria are naturally present in the mouth and are often detectable as a thin (or thick!) sticky film called plaque over the teeth especially at gum level. These bacteria cannot be removed completely - the point of cleaning teeth is to remove as many of them as possible and to maintain an environment that discourages the more 'dangerous' types of bacteria.

Most people brush their teeth at least once daily, and often more often, but it is usually done in an inefficient manner and too quickly, leaving a lot of plaque behind. Careful cleaning can take a bit longer, but for those patients without serious problems it will not involve too much extra effort.

Thorough cleaning can reduce the risk of decay or gum problems starting, or slow the rate they progress at. It also produces fresher breath and a 'cleaner' feel to the teeth and mouth.

Electric Toothbrushes

The new designs of electric toothbrush have improved brushing immensely. They brush very efficiently and encourage longer brushing times. They appear to be suitable for all ages. The main differences are to move it slowly from tooth to tooth, tilt it at around 45 degrees, and use a little less force.

There is no reason that children cannot use them

There are two main types—the 'oscillating-rotating' type as made by Oral B and the sonic type, made by Philips Sonicare.

Both work well and

So How Should I Be Doing It?

Brush Type - the commonest problem we see is a brush that is too worn and 'rounded' or far too big. There are a huge variety on the market, but the basic things to look for are:

- * Soft or medium bristle 'stiffness'
- * Compact head approximately the diameter of a £1 coin long
- * A handle you can hold on to firmly.

Toothpaste - very little real difference exists between brands despite all the brands available - basically choose one you like the taste of. The only other factor is if you need a toothpaste to reduce cold sensitivity

Floss type - there are many types on the market - beginners often find the tapes easier to use as there is more to hold onto. As with toothbrushes the proper technique is more important than the floss used.

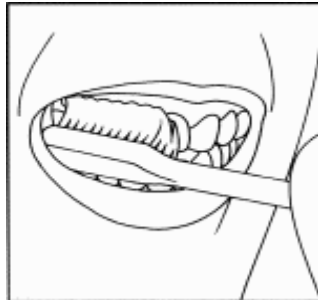
Frequency - It is better to brush thoroughly once a day than quickly 3 or 4 times.. Ideally brushing should be done thoroughly twice a day for at least two to three minutes for the average set of teeth. Flossing will take an extra minute or two.

Timing - classically it was recommended that straight after meals was the best time to brush. Now the only definite advice is to brush in the morning, possibly before breakfast if it includes acidic foods, and last thing at night after any food or drink .

Rinsing - It has been shown that not rinsing after brushing reduces decay as the fluoride has longer to act.

Brushing Technique

- * To clean the outer surfaces of each tooth, tilt your toothbrush at a 45-degree angle against the gumline.
- * Move the brush back and forth, using short, gentle circular strokes.
- * Repeat this motion on the inside, outside and chewing surfaces of your teeth.
- * To clean the inner surfaces of your front teeth, hold the brush vertically and use gentle up-and-down strokes with the front part of the brush.
- * Pay extra attention to the gumline, hard-to-reach back teeth and areas around fillings, crowns or other restorations. Plaque builds up more on the areas of teeth covered by dentures
- * And, for fresher breath, brush your tongue, too! To do this grab the tip with a clean facecloth or piece of gauze and scrub the top surface vigorously.



A Few Other Points:

Children are generally only able to use a simple scrub-brushing technique until they are 7 - 10. Assisted parental brushing and supervision on a regular basis is advisable to ensure it has been done properly. Their brushing can also be checked with disclosing tablets.

Patients with dentures need to be particularly thorough brushing both their dentures to remove all the plaque and the areas of gum and tooth covered by a denture, which is more likely to develop gum and decay problems.

Brushing can become more difficult if the patient is put on drug treatment that makes their mouth drier. This is a side effect of very many drugs. It is also possible for the gums to be directly affected by a few drugs with one group of blood pressure control drugs being the commonest. If you feel this is a possibility then please discuss it with your dentist.

But My Teeth Are Really Sensitive When I Brush Them...

If your gums are tender and bleed on brushing then they should improve once you start brushing them properly.

If they do not then arrange a visit with your dentist or one of our hygienists as professional cleaning or advice may be needed.

If it is cold sensitivity from the necks of the teeth then this is a bit more of a problem to manage. The hard outer layer of enamel stops at the tooth neck, and a softer material - dentine - is exposed by the gums receding.

Modern diets are often quite acidic - fruit juices, fruit, wine, fizzy drinks, etc compared to the diets of 20 years ago.

Dentine is easily softened by these acids and can be brushed away exposing the tiny tubules in dentine that are associated with the sensitivity.

Management of the problem focuses on reducing the acid exposure and brushing before the acid exposure, so the softened dentine has a chance to recover. This often means brushing before meals, using a soft brush and a gentle technique.

Anti-sensitivity toothpastes need to be used or applied gently after normal brushing and left to 'soak in' They work by trying to block the tubules. Your dentist can also apply materials to block the tubules, or if the wear is deep enough, place a filling material over the neck of the tooth.