Overcoming Toothbrushing Problems

- **Biting on the toothbrush.** Allow your child to continue biting the toothbrush whilst the teeth are cleaned with another toothbrush.
- **Strong tongue thrust.** A mobile tongue or tight lip may tend to push the toothbrush out of the mouth. Use a flannel or a clean cloth wrapped around the forefinger to gently retract or hold back the tongue or lip.
- **Gagging on brushing.** Try brushing by starting from the back teeth using a small brush and gently move forward. Have a break as required.
- **Reduced cooperation.** Start in a different area of the mouth, keeping note of the area brushed each time (i.e. several short sessions). Playing music or even brushing your child’s teeth in the bath, or whilst he or she watches TV may help.

Toothbrushing for another person is not always an easy task. Seek professional dental help if necessary.

**Diet And Nutrition**

Good nutrition and healthy eating habits play a key role in preventing tooth decay. **Sugar** is the main dietary cause of tooth decay.

To reduce the risk of dental disease you can:

- Give your baby the bottle only at feed times and not as a comforter throughout the day and night. If you must give your baby a bottle to aid sleep, place only water in it and remove the bottle once your baby is asleep. Adding sugary (e.g. cordial) or acidic drinks (e.g. juice, soft drink) in infant bottles or feeders can lead to early childhood decay and erosion of tooth enamel.
- Do not put sweeteners (e.g. honey) on the dummy.
- Guide your child away from sugary foods and drinks especially in between meals as sugar encourages the growth of germs in the mouth.
- Provide a variety of healthy nutritious foods and offer water to quench thirst.
- Always ask for sugar free medication.

**Dental Visits**

Develop a good relationship with the dental team to help your child get used to the dental surroundings. Your child should have a check-up no later than 2 years of age.

**As your child grows, maintaining a healthy lifestyle will help to ensure a healthy smile.**

**Down Syndrome and Dental Care**

**Healthy Teeth Happy Smile**

Your child can have healthy teeth for their lifetime but it must begin with care of their baby teeth.

You play an important role in your child’s dental health. In fact good dental care begins with you.

Establish and maintain good toothbrushing for your child between dental visits. Working with the dental team will greatly reduce their risk of dental disease.
Oral And Dental Conditions That May Affect Your Child

- Orofacial problems such as a large protrusive tongue, poor muscle tone and an open mouth posture are common in Down Syndrome (DS) people. This combination often leads to the accumulation of food debris in the mouth and can result in an increased risk to dental disease.
- Mouth breathing reduces the protective benefit of saliva on tooth surfaces and gums. The lips also tend to be dry and cracked.
- Delayed eruption of the teeth, small teeth and missing teeth.
- Mal-formed teeth or defects in the tooth enamel.
- Incorrect bite and/or crowded teeth.

Medical Conditions That May Affect Your Child’s Dental Health

- A compromised immune system. This leads to an increased susceptibility to infections. Plaque, (a sticky film of germs), and food left around the gumline is more likely to cause gum inflammation and tooth decay in a child with DS. Such individuals are susceptible to an aggressive form of gum disease leading to infection and pain. If untreated this will result in bone loss and deep pocketing with eventual tooth loss.
- Cardiac disorders. Carrying out certain dental procedures can present a health risk for the DS individual with cardiac disease. The dentist may prescribe an antibiotic (preventive) prophylaxis prior to carrying out the dental treatment.
- Hearing problems. The DS child is prone to middle ear infections. Face pain may be confused as an earache when in fact it could be a toothache. Always check the mouth and teeth.
- Under-active thyroid. This makes the DS individual more prone to a weight problem. Healthy eating is not only important for the teeth but for the body.

If you have any concerns, chat to your dental professional who will be able to advise you on preventive measures you can practice at home. Good care of teeth and gums is a must - not just for a healthy smile but also for a healthy body.

How can you help?

Brush your child’s teeth as soon as the first tooth appears. Any technique that removes debris and plaque from the teeth and gums in a gentle, non-damaging way is acceptable. Always encourage your child to brush their own teeth, even if support and assistance is required. Most importantly discuss your child’s toothbrushing skills with the dental team and ask for advice. Good toothbrushing means removing the food debris and plaque (germs) that form daily on teeth and gums. Start a toothbrushing routine early so that it becomes a daily habit.

Teeth Tools

Always ask the your dental professional for advice on the correct cleaning aids for you child’s needs.

1. Toothbrushes
   - Manual toothbrush should have a small head and soft bristles. Suitable for children who are cooperative.
   - Electric toothbrush is very effective but not suitable for all, for example the vibration and noise may upset your child.
   - Collis Curve is suitable when toothbrushing is difficult i.e. tight mouth muscles. This brush is best used by the carer, not the child.

2. Toothpaste
   It must be non abrasive, have a pleasant flavour and contain fluoride. Fluoride helps prevent tooth decay plus strengthens and protects teeth.
   - Use no more than a pea-sized amount of low strength fluoride toothpaste for children under 6 years of age or a smear of normal strength fluoride toothpaste.
   - Use non–foaming gel if your child has a gagging problem.

How To Brush

It often helps to stand behind your child, slightly to one side and tilt his or her head back. Ensure the position is comfortable for both of you. It is essential to make toothbrushing a positive experience.

By brushing ‘every bit of every tooth’ the plaque is removed, thereby reducing the risk of tooth decay and gum disease.

Ideally brush after meals and before bed in the evening. It is always best to go to sleep with clean teeth because during sleep saliva production is reduced increasing the risk of dental diseases.