Fluoride Information
Delivering a Healthy WA

Fluoride protects your teeth against tooth decay

Fluoride is a natural mineral found in food, plants, air and water. It strengthens teeth against plaque acid attacks which are produced after eating or drinking anything containing sugar. Fluoride can also reverse the early stages of tooth decay.

‘Water fluoridation’ is the addition of fluoride to water supplies that are low in fluoride and is a cost effective way of preventing tooth decay. So fluoride in your drinking water is like a constant ‘repair kit’ for your teeth.

In the past, people living in non-fluoridated areas or using tank water, were advised to take fluoride supplements in the form of drops and tablets to help prevent tooth decay. However, the use of supplements in children under 6 years of age has been associated with an increased risk of dental fluorosis (white markings or mottling on the adult teeth). As a result the current Australian guidelines advise that fluoride supplements should not be used. Therefore, fluoride tablets/drops are no longer available in WA.

If your drinking water is not fluoridated or you are on tank water ask your dental professional for advice on other options for gaining the benefits of fluoride. These options may include more frequent use of toothpaste (brush 3 times a day instead of 2); introducing toothpaste at a younger age; or introducing adult strength toothpaste at a younger age. A dental professional will determine the best options for each individual.

Fluoride toothpaste

The Australian guidelines for the use of fluoride toothpaste are ....

• for children up to 17 months of age no toothpaste should be used
• for children aged 18 months to 5 years use a ‘pea sized’ amount of low fluoride toothpaste
• for children aged 6 years and over, use adult strength toothpaste
• supervise children during toothbrushing until 7 to 8 years of age
• brush at least twice a day, in the morning and before bed at night, using a soft toothbrush
• encourage children to spit out, not swallow and not rinse after brushing

Children up to 6 years of age tend to swallow rather than spit out most of the toothpaste that goes into their mouth. Adding water to rinse the mouth increases the likelihood of swallowing the toothpaste. This is a risk factor for fluorosis, therefore it is important to supervise toothbrushing.

If you choose to drink bottled water, check the label for fluoride content. If using a water filter, select one that does not remove fluoride. Manufacturers can advise on this.

A lovely smile

For healthy teeth and gums, have a healthy diet, limit sugary foods and drinks, brush twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste, floss daily and have regular dental checks.

Contact the Dental Health Education Unit for further information on 9313 0604/5 or email dheu@dental.health.wa.gov.au
Alternatively visit www.dental.wa.gov.au
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