

# Oral Health Promotion Policy Guidelines For Healthy Teeth

## **Introduction**

Child oral health has been improving and far fewer children experience tooth decay than they did 30 years ago. The earlier a good oral health routine can be put into place the better. If we teach children the importance of toothbrushing, keeping sugary snacks and drinks till mealtimes and dental attendance they are more likely to follow this on into adulthood.

Oral health is an integral element of general health and well-being. Good oral health enables individuals to communicate effectively, to eat and enjoy a variety of foods, and is important in overall quality of life, self-esteem and social confidence. Oral diseases are largely preventable but no easy or quick fixes exist to promote oral health. Interventions need to be developed that will achieve sustained long term improvements in oral health. Pain, discomfort, sleepless nights, limitation in eating function leading to poor nutrition, and time off school due to dental problems are all common impacts of oral diseases.

Despite the general improvement in oral health there remain very marked inequalities in oral health. People living in areas of material and social deprivation have much higher levels of tooth decay. They are more likely to have diets high in sugary foods and drinks and they brush their teeth less often. Vulnerable groups of society also have poorer oral health and less access to oral health care services. For example, people with learning disabilities and people with mental illness tend to have fewer teeth, more untreated decay and more periodontal disease than the general population.

The most common oral diseases, tooth decay and periodontal disease can both cause pain and infection as well as eventual tooth loss. Acute dental infection can cause swelling and sever pain and in extreme cases can be life threatening. Chronic infection also tastes and smells unpleasant. Dental treatment has become much more acceptable due to advances in technology and behaviour management techniques. However, extensive treatment can still be stressful, especially for young children. Many children still have teeth extracted under general anaesthetic, a distressing experience and an avoidable, albeit small, risk to life.

This policy advises you on the basic standards that should be adopted to maintain good oral health in school.

## **Criteria**

As part of the ongoing work in Swalwell Primary School we follow guidelines for healthy teeth. The guidelines we have to promote the importance of good oral health and encourage habits conducive with this are:

### **We only offer milk and water to drink at snack times**

Children in Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 are given milk as part of the school day and access to drinking water is available throughout the day for all Key Stages. Children are encouraged to bring their own water bottles, containing water. No fruit juices, fizzy drinks or energy drinks are allowed in school

### **We only offer healthy snacks to eat**

Children in Early Years and Key Stage 1 receive fruit for snacks as part of the fruit for school scheme. The school purchase extra fruit for Key Stage 2 for snack time.

We do not allow sweets or confectionery on the premises or in the playground and do not use sweets as a reward.

### **We take part in dental health activities throughout Early Years, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.**

### **We promote positive oral health messages in school**

Children are encouraged to bring healthy lunch boxes to school. Lunchtime Supervisors encourage children to eat savoury before sweet at lunch time.

## Regular Dental Care

It is very important that children have regular dental examinations starting as young an age as possible. Visit or phone the practice of your choice and ask if they are happy to see your child under the NHS. You are not obliged to stay at the same dentist and can change practice if you want to, however it is getting increasingly difficult to find an NHS dentist.

If you have any problems finding an NHS dentist or you would like further advice on NHS practices you can contact:

NHS 111

Tel: 111

[www.nhs.uk/111](http://www.nhs.uk/111)

NHS Choices

Tel: 0300 3112233

[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

Alternatively the Community Dental Service from South Tyneside Foundation Trust covering Gateshead, South Tyneside and Sunderland provide a full range of treatments for patients of all ages who have difficulty in accessing treatment from general dental services. Dental care is provided, on referral and by appointment only for patients with a wide range of special needs. This will include; individuals who are medically compromised or have mental health issues; adults and children with severe learning disabilities or physical disabilities and children with behavioural management issues. This care includes routine care, specialised clinical services in paediatric dentistry, sedation and general anaesthesia in a hospital setting.

**Patients who fit the referral criteria can be seen following a referral by a health or social care professional, care provider or voluntary organization. Self-referrals from those fitting the referral criteria will also be accepted.**

For further information contact Dental Admin Team: 0191 5026751

## Guidance on Nutrition & Drinks

A balanced diet for children will include food from each of the four main food groups:

- Bread, potatoes and other cereals
- Fruit and vegetables
- Milk and dairy foods
- Meat, fish and alternatives such as pulses and tofu

Eating a healthy balanced diet which contains plenty of fruit and vegetables and is low in fat, salt and sugar and, based on whole grain products is important for promoting good general health. Children need to eat regularly, and so nutritious snacks between meals are an important part of the day. The best snacks to serve should be sugar free and so aren't likely to cause tooth decay. Healthier options prove popular with children and give them a chance to sample foods that are not always served at home.

Ideas for nutritious snacks include:

- Peeled and chopped fruit and vegetables
- Any type of bread including sandwiches (healthy fillings)
- Dairy foods such as cheese or plain yogurt with added fruit
- Crackers such as water biscuits, plain breadsticks and cream crackers
- Crumpets, savoury muffins, toasted fingers with cheese spread, pitta bread with Home-made dips
- Home made plain popcorn

Nuts, dried fruit, crisps and highly processed puffed starchy snacks are not recommended snacks. This is because:

- Whole nuts can cause choking and some children may suffer from nut allergies
- Dried fruit whilst good as a pudding after a meal should not be given as an in between snack; this is due to the sugars that they contain and their sticky consistency
- Crisps are fine for occasional treats, but because of the fat and salt content, are not ideal as a daily item
- Highly processed starchy snacks are as salty as crisps and because the starch in them is finely ground up, they may damage teeth if eaten often.

The safest drinks for teeth, between meals are milk and plain water. Water is an ideal choice for quenching thirst at any time. Chilling or adding ice can increase its appeal to children. Tea, coffee, fizzy drinks and juices both the regular, 'diet', and no added sugar varieties should be avoided altogether. Read labels carefully for hidden sugars and remember even though it may say no added sugar, this simply means that no more sugar has been added.

### **Artificially Sweetened Foods and Drinks**

Manufacturers have produced a wide range of foods, confectionery and drinks that contain an artificial sweetener rather than, or in addition to, sugar. You may see these listed on food labels as:

### **Sorbitol – Xylitol – Aspartame - Acesulfame K - Saccharin**

**Artificial sweeteners if consumed in large amounts can have a laxative effect on children.** In addition, given artificially sweetened drinks may encourage a 'sweet tooth' which could cause problems with tooth decay later in life.

### **Birthdays & Celebrations**

Birthdays and celebrations are an important part of a child's life, during school time as this may be the only opportunity the child may have to celebrate his or her birthday. Children are encouraged to bring in healthy treats to celebrate birthdays. If cakes or sweets are brought in for birthdays they will be sent home with the children rather than being eaten in school.