



Nutritional tips for protecting toddlers from tooth decay

The Infant & Toddler Forum provides information on how early years providers can promote good oral health among toddlers in settings and by supporting parents

Children's dental health remains a costly problem in the UK. In January, new figures from the Local Government Association showed that a record 40,000 children had rotting teeth removed in hospital last year. It is therefore important that early years providers understand how to protect toddlers from tooth decay, and how to share this with parents.

To help prevent tooth decay in toddlers, regular brushing with a fluoride toothpaste is recommended (see page 24 for more information), alongside sensible eating and drinking habits.

Some easy-to-follow nutrition tips to ensure toddler diets are tooth-friendly:

- Limit any sweet food to mealtimes and no more than one sweet snack per day. The other snacks should be savoury.
- Do not give toddlers sweet drinks, including fruit juice and smoothies, as both the acid and sugar in these can damage the teeth. If fruit juice is given, parents should be advised to dilute the juice in quantities of one part juice to 10 parts water.
- Serve all drinks in a cup, not a bottle. Sweet drinks in a bottle are particularly harmful for teeth because sucking slowly on sweet drinks increases the risk of tooth decay.
- Leaving a bottle of milk or a sweet drink with a toddler when you settle them down to drink is the most harmful for teeth. Toddlers should only be given water at night and nap times.
- If a child uses a pacifier, soother or dummy, make sure it is an orthodontic dummy and

never dip it in anything sweet.

- Start offering a cup or free-flow beaker for drinks from about six months or so. Stop using bottles around 12 months. Water or milk are safe drinks between meals and snacks.
- Dried fruit bars and cereals are sweet snacks and should be avoided. Dentists recommend only giving dried fruit with meals and not as a snack.
- Do not allow grazing on food and drinks during the day. Only offer a toddler food a three meals and two to three snacks each day.

Ideas for your setting

To teach toddlers about dental health, why not invite a local dentist into your setting to speak, hold a teeth-themed story time or give out toothbrushes to children as prizes for competitions? This can give dental health an element of fun and help to encourage healthy habits for life.

Suitable snacks your setting can offer

Fruit: Offer bite-sized chunks, cubes or slices of apple, pear, satsuma, orange, banana, kiwi, melon, strawberries, sliced grapes, peaches and plums.

Raw vegetables: Give sticks or slices of carrot, pepper, celery, cucumber, sliced cherry tomatoes, radishes and broccoli.

Toast, bread, rolls, breadsticks: Try French bread with a small amount of spread or butter, mini savoury sandwiches with marmite, cheese,

tuna, banana, salad or thin slices of meat. Pita pockets can be cut into small slices or toasted with or without spread. Breadsticks can be offered alone or with a dip or soft cheese.

Oatcakes, rice cakes, crackers, melba toast and crispbreads: Offer these plain or with butter or spread, or use a savoury spread such as peanut butter or marmite.

Natural yoghurt of fromage frais: Give these on their own or serve as a dip with fruit.

Muffins, plain, potato or cheese scones, crumpets, pancakes, plain popcorn: Try these on their own or served with a small amount of butter or spread.

Wholegrain breakfast cereals: These can be offered instead of cereal bars or dried fruit bars.

Medicines

Where possible, try to use a sugar-free medicine. If a child is prescribed a medicine, ensure that they use a sugar-free option where available. If there isn't a sugar-free option, give them the medicine at meal times.

For more information about dental caries, download our Protecting Toddlers from Tooth Decay Factsheet at www.infantandtoddlerforum.org.

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