

## Dental public health expert reacts to LGA report on children's teeth

April 15 2016, by Andrew Gould

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The Local Government Association has today published a report that states that around 100 children and teenagers a day are being admitted to hospital for surgery to remove rotten teeth.

The report says that £35 million was spent in 2014-15 on removing children's rotten teeth, a 66 per cent increase since 2010-11. In all, 40,970 surgical procedures were carried out on children for their teeth in 2014-15, as opposed to 32,457 in 2010-11.

The report points the blame at the amount of sugar children consume in food and drink.

Professor Liz Kay, Foundation Dean of the Peninsula Dental School at Plymouth University and a nationally-recognised dental public health expert, welcomes the report.

She said:

"The contents of this report are simply shocking. I find it outrageous that in this country and in this day and age so many children are undergoing surgery for a condition which is largely preventable. If that many children were having another body part removed because of something we could prevent there would, quite correctly, be a public outcry."

She added:

"While the report highlights the parlous state of our children's teeth and makes for depressing reading, it has at least brought the issue to the public's attention. Much has been made of sugar's contribution to childhood obesity, but its effect on children's teeth is just as perilous. A better understanding of diet and good oral health techniques will help parents and carers go a long way to improving their children's teeth and avoiding those trips to hospital for surgery. But they need to be supported by the food and drink industry which must surely now address the amount of hidden sugar in what ordinary people consume every day."

Here, the team at Plymouth University Peninsula School of Dentistry

provide basic advice on looking after children's teeth.

## Food and drink

- Try to limit the amount of sugary and acidic foods and drinks children consume. Sugary drinks and snacks between meals will harm teeth and frequent snacking may make your children less hungry when it's meal time.
- Between meals try tooth friendly snacks like cheese, fruit and vegetable sticks (e.g carrot, cucumber), breadsticks, marmite or butter on toast, rice cakes, or a bowl of non-sugary cereal with milk (don't add sugar or honey).
- Limit dried fruit between meals as it is high in sugar and can stick to children's teeth.
- Never allow sugary foods or drinks just before bed, and only drink water at night.
- Keep sweets, cakes, fizzy drinks and other 'treats' for pudding or as part of a meal.

## Brushing your teeth

To keep children's teeth happy and healthy follow this brushing code:

- Help children to brush their teeth for two minutes twice a day. Always last thing at night and then at one other time during the day (lots of people choose first thing in the morning – this should be before breakfast).
- Use a [fluoride toothpaste](#). Fluoride is the superhero ingredient in toothpaste. You only need to use a small amount of toothpaste, about the size of a pea.
- Adults and children over three years old should use a toothpaste with a fluoride level of 1350ppm to 1500ppm (parts per million).

This will be printed in tiny numbers on both the box and the tube so have a look and see how much is in yours.

- Use a toothbrush with a small head. This will help you to clean the back teeth and in all the tiny spaces.
- Spit, don't rinse. Don't wash all the superhero fluoride off the teeth.
- Brush teeth in a special order so you don't miss any: and make sure you get all five surfaces of each tooth (biting/chewing surface, front, back, inside and outside)
- Be gentle. Use circular or tiny side to side movements- don't scrub gums away.
- Brush the gums where they meet the teeth gently using the same circular or tiny side to side movement.
- A disclosing tablet may help to show any areas you might have missed. These are available from the dentist or chemist and contain a vegetable dye which will show up any plaque you have missed when brushing.
- Replace a child's toothbrush regularly. A three-month old toothbrush is 30 per cent less effective at removing plaque than a new one.
- If using a powered toothbrush make sure it is charged or change the batteries regularly so the brush remains effective.
- Make brushing fun. Sing songs with your child whilst you brush or download their favourite song to brush their teeth to – there is a brilliant and proven app called Brush DJ that does just this.
- Make a brushing chart and award a sticker each time your child cleans their teeth.
- There are some great tooth brushing apps so maybe choose one together.
- Remember – we recommend that you help your [children](#) brush their [teeth](#) until they are at least seven years old.

Provided by University of Plymouth

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