

Dental Factsheets

Keeping your teeth healthy

Why teeth decay

Much of the food and drink we consume contains sugar or acid which can cause a loss of minerals from our teeth. Over time this can result in tooth decay. Saliva is released into our mouths to help stop this happening, but this can take up to two hours to work.

This means that after a meal containing sugar, acid will be attacking your teeth for up to two hours. If you have three meals a day without anything in between, your teeth will generally cope without a problem as they repair themselves when there is no acid present.

However, if we eat and/or drink too many things with sugar and acid in them over the day, this process cannot keep up and so our teeth will eventually begin to decay. Research shows that anything over 10 hours a day of 'acid attack' will generally mean a trip to the dentist.

How to stop your teeth decaying

- Cut down on the amount and frequency of sugary food and drink you consume
- Use toothpaste and other dental hygiene products that contain Fluoride
- Brush your teeth regularly and effectively - Our hygienist can help you make sure you are doing this properly
- Eat less acidic foods

Remember when checking food labels on prepared food, the higher up the list the sugar content is shown the more sugar there is in the product

Foods that you can be confident are safe for your teeth are milk, cheese, vegetables, fresh fruit and bread

Things to avoid include processed foods such as sweets, biscuits, cakes as well as favourites like cola and fruit juice. A large Cola, for example, can contain anything up to 22 teaspoons of sugar.

The good news is that you don't have to give up all your favourite foods, just eat them as part of your main meals.

What to do in an emergency

If you have an urgent problem with your teeth ring the surgery as soon as you can and if it is possible, I will see you the same day. If not, I will see you as soon as I can the following day.

Out of hours, please leave a message at the practice and we will get back to you as soon as possible. You can also call Croydent on 0203 402 1333, NHS DIRECT on 111 or my mobile on 07736 525629 where I may be able to give advice if I am available.

Some advice if any of your teeth need to be extracted

A clean and healthy mouth aids healing. The following steps will help prevent bleeding and relieve soreness:

Rest for a few hours following treatment and avoid strenuous exercise.

The area will be numb for 3-4 hours after treatment, be careful not bite lip, tongue or cheek by accident.

Do not rinse your mouth for at least 6 hours. For the next few days rinse your mouth gently after meals and before going to bed using a mouthwash made by dissolving 2 teaspoon of salt in a mug of boiled water. Allow it to cool enough so you don't burn your mouth. Hold this in your mouth for 1 minute and repeat 2-3 times.

As an alternative you can use an off the shelf mouthwash but salt is best.

Avoid hot fluids, alcohol, hard or chewy foods. Choose cool drinks and soft or minced foods. Avoid sucking at or touching the wound.

Slight bleeding or 'oozing' may occur during the first 24 hours. Should this happen, sit upright with head and shoulders raised. Apply pressure with a small pad of gauze or clean linen clamped firmly between the jaws for 15 minutes - repeat if necessary.

Some swelling is not unusual but it will reduce after 2-3 days. It may be reduced by ice or cold compresses held over the area.

Avoid smoking as this delays healing.

Use painkillers if you need to but try to avoid Aspirin. If excessive bleeding, undue pain or other symptoms occur contact me for help as soon as you can.