



Your child's teeth

What have teeth got to do with the heart?

Our mouths are full of bacteria that build up on the teeth in a sticky layer (plaque). These bacteria feed off the sugar in our food and drink and convert it into acid which can cause tooth decay. Bacteria also make the gums inflamed and cause gum disease.

Tooth decay and gum disease (dental disease) can cause a disease of the heart called infective endocarditis. This is an infection of the inner lining of the heart caused by bacteria in the bloodstream.

Dental disease can push large numbers of bacteria into the bloodstream. Large numbers of bacteria in the bloodstream can then lead to infective endocarditis. Infective endocarditis is a rare but life-threatening disease.

Children with heart conditions are more at risk of infective endocarditis. It is therefore very important for heart children to take good care of their teeth.

How can you prevent dental disease?

Limit sugar in the diet

- Avoid sugary foods and drinks between meals
- Sweets are best given after a meal
- Do not put sweetened drinks in bottles for young children
- Ask for sugar-free medicines

Some children with heart conditions may have feeding problems, and it may be more important for them to get enough calories than to maintain a healthy diet. These children may be eating lots of sugary foods to maintain a healthy weight. If this is the case, make sure that your child brushes their teeth well and often and goes to the dentist regularly.

Tooth brushing

- Help and encourage your child to brush their teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste
- Choose a small brush and use a small pea-sized amount of toothpaste for under six year olds
- Use disclosing tablets to help you show your child any areas they have missed. Disclosing tablets are small pills that, if chewed for 30 seconds, turn plaque a bright colour (usually pink). You can buy these tablets at chemist shops

Register with a dentist

- Register your child as soon as possible and inform the dentist that your child has a congenital heart defect. Your dentist will then be able to provide the best possible advice and treatment
- Ask for advice about fluoride supplements
- Your dentist will be able to provide plastic coatings to protect your child's adult molar teeth when they erupt at around 6 years of age

Dental disease and heart conditions

Some children with heart conditions may be more vulnerable to dental problems. For example, learning difficulties or poor manual dexterity may mean your child has problems brushing their teeth. Speak to your child's dentist if you are concerned about their dental hygiene.

More information

Children are treated free under the NHS. To find an NHS dentist in your area, ring NHS Customer Contact Centre: **0300 311 2233**.

Evidence and sources of information for this CHF information sheet can be obtained at:

NHS Choices. Endocarditis.

Contact CHF for more information, resources, support and advice

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