

## 5 keys to prevent dental disease

### 1. Plaque control

Brushing and flossing is still the most effective way to remove plaque (which causes gingivitis) and to improve gum health. Antibacterial mouth rinses and gels can be helpful to stop the germs that cause tooth decay. Consult your dentist regarding the most appropriate mouth rinse for your child.

### 2. Good feeding practices

Good feeding habits should be developed from birth. With young children, prolonged use of a nursing bottle, especially at night, may cause severe tooth decay. Drinking from a cup by 12 months of age is recommended. Polyjoule contains maltodextrin which may also cause dental decay. With older children, a diet with adequate fibre and less sugar will reduce their chances of developing tooth decay. Do not give sweets and biscuits to your children as rewards.

### 3. Topical fluoride

Topical fluoride is available in many forms. Fluoride toothpaste is the most widely used and cheapest form. Topical fluoride gels, mouth rinses, fluoride tablets and drops are available commercially but professional advice should be obtained before using these products.

### 4. Sugar-free medications

Medications that treat your child's heart conditions should not be changed without consulting your child's cardiologist. They can give you advice about possible alternatives including sugar-free medications. The teeth should be carefully cleaned after all liquid medications or your child should rinse their mouth with water.

### 5. Fissure sealants

Fissure sealants are plastic coatings applied on the fissures of a tooth (where most decay starts) to prevent decay. The procedure is quick and simple. No injection or unpleasant treatment is involved. The application of fissure sealants, together with good diet and the use of topical fluoride, can almost prevent all tooth decay.

## Cardiology

# Dental health

for children with heart conditions

The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne  
50 Flemington Road Parkville  
Victoria 3052 Australia  
TELEPHONE +61 3 9345 5522  
[www.rch.org.au](http://www.rch.org.au)

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# Dental care for children with heart conditions

Tooth decay (dental caries) and gum disease (gingivitis) are the most common oral diseases. Tooth decay and its complications, e.g. tooth ache and abscess are still a major health problem for children.

Children with heart conditions have an increased risk of having dental diseases compared with other children due to poor enamel formation. The decay risk is further increased with the use of medications and nutrition supplements containing sugar.

## Why is oral health important for my child?

Conditions such as tooth abscess and gum infection can cause 'bacteraemia' which is a shower of bacteria entering the blood stream. Although the body's white blood cells usually destroy these germs, infection of the heart called 'infective endocarditis' can sometimes occur.

## What is infective endocarditis?

Infective endocarditis is an infection of the tissue that lines the heart and blood vessels. Although rare, it is a serious medical problem which requires hospitalisation and prolonged treatment with antibiotics. Children with congenital heart disease are at risk of developing infective endocarditis.

## Why may this happen in a child with a heart abnormality/defect?

In many children with congenital heart defects (and in some with other types of heart disease) the smooth lining of the heart (endocardium) may be abnormally thin or roughened in places and bacteria can stick to it and cause infection.

## What can be done to reduce the risk of endocarditis?

The best way of reducing the risk of endocarditis is to make sure your child's teeth and gums are healthy. Children with certain heart problems should also be given antibiotic cover for dental procedures to help prevent infection.



## Should my child have dental treatment?

Regular dental visits starting before 18 months of age are important for prevention, early diagnosis and treatment of dental diseases. If dental disease is diagnosed, it should be treated as soon as possible.

Some dental procedures can cause gum bleeding, e.g. cleaning of teeth when gums are inflamed, deep fillings and tooth extractions: such procedures may cause bacteraemia.

You should talk to your child's cardiologist about whether your child requires antibiotics for these dental procedures. If your child's cardiologist recommends that they have antibiotic cover it must be given just before the treatment is commenced.

Dental procedures that are unlikely to cause bacteraemia are simple fillings, fissure sealants and cleaning procedures that do not cause gum bleeding. These procedures may not require antibiotic cover (your dentist will advise).

## My child is taking medicine

It is important to inform your dentist about your child's heart condition and any medications they take because certain drugs such as aspirin and warfarin may complicate dental treatment. However, dental treatment is safe with the appropriate precautions. You should talk to your child's cardiologist about whether your child should have changes to their medications before any dental procedure.