

## Children's Speech and Language Therapy Service

# Mouth Care for Children with Eating, Drinking and Swallowing Difficulties

### [Why have I been given this leaflet?](#)

You have been given this leaflet as your child has difficulties with eating, drinking and swallowing. Our aim is to offer practical advice about caring for your child's mouth and teeth.

### [Why does my child need to brush their teeth?](#)

Teeth need to be cleaned regularly because:

- It reduces plaque which contains harmful bacteria. If this bacteria is aspirated (goes down the wrong way due to swallowing difficulties) it could contribute to a chest infection.
- It reduces the risk of tooth decay and gum disease.
- It makes your child's mouth feel more comfortable and smell more pleasant.

### [How can I keep my child's mouth healthy?](#)

What to do:

- Brush teeth with your child sitting or standing upright and tilted slightly forward.
- Apply half a pea-sized amount of toothpaste to the brush. There is no need to wet the brush because the toothpaste needs to stick to the teeth.
- Clean the gums and teeth twice a day, dentists recommend:

## How to clean your child's gums and teeth:

1. Start at the back of the mouth on one side and work around to the front teeth before moving to the back teeth on the other side.
2. Angle the bristles of the brush along the gum line and use a gentle and controlled scrub.
3. Make sure all the surfaces of the teeth are brushed.
4. Do not rinse out, simply leave the toothpaste in the mouth.
5. When finished, rinse the brush under running water and store in an upright position and allow to air dry.

## What with:

- Low flavour toothpaste
- Non-foaming toothpaste containing low or no sodium lauryl sulphate (SLS) may help. This is suitable for children who are at increased risk of aspiration.

## Who can help me?

- All children should be seen by a dentist at least twice a year. A dental visit is recommended within 6 months of the first tooth coming through.
- There are specialist community dentists available for children with additional needs. A referral to this service can be made by any health professional involved in your child's care.
- If you go to see a specialist dentist, your child may be able to stay in

their own therapeutic seating depending on the equipment available at that clinic.

- Your child's School Nurse/ Health Visitor can provide more advice around tooth brushing, including how to introduce it.
- If you have concerns about your child's risk of aspiration please discuss this with your child's Speech and Language Therapist.
- If you need help with positioning your child for teeth cleaning ask your child's Physiotherapist or Occupational Therapist.