

# HOW TO PROTECT YOUR CHILD'S TEETH

## **Caries damages your child's teeth**

Caries is a disease that begins with damage to the surface of the tooth, and then gradually becomes a cavity deeper in the tooth.

The simplest way to protect yourself against caries is to brush your teeth with a toothpaste containing fluoride. You should do this every day - there is scientific evidence that this is effective.

## **Young children need help with brushing!**

Help your small children to brush their teeth! It is not until they reach school age that children manage to brush their own teeth properly. Put a small amount of fluoride toothpaste on a child's toothbrush and brush your child's teeth carefully every evening after the last meal. For small children who cannot spit out the toothpaste, you should use a small amount about the size of the child's little fingernail. Preschool children should use a children's toothpaste with lower fluoride content.

## **What is fluoride and how does it work?**

Fluoride is a substance that exists in nature, and often in drinking-water. Most types of toothpaste contain fluoride. Fluoride strengthens the teeth so that they develop a better protection against caries.

## **Is there anything else you can do to protect the teeth?**

It is also important not to eat frequent small snacks. Sweets and sweet drinks between meals increase the risk of caries. A piece of good advice is usually to let children eat all their sweets once each week ("lördagsgodis" as the Swedes say) and then brush their teeth afterwards. After a sweet drink, it can be a good idea to drink some water. Rinsing the teeth with a solution containing fluoride also protects the teeth of those who are not so conscientious with their brushing.

Rinsing with fluoride can, however, only be used on slightly older children, since the liquid must not be swallowed. It is also possible to treat the teeth with a fluoride varnish. This is done by a dentist or a dental hygienist.

## **Why do you get caries?**

Bacteria which exist naturally in the mouth can transform sugar in the food into an acid which slowly attacks the tooth. When there is less sugar in the mouth, the breakdown stops and there is time for the surface of the tooth to be built up again.

If you eat often, the natural balance between breaking-down and building-up forces on the teeth is upset, and the teeth do not have time to be restored. Instead, they suffer caries.

Teeth-brushing removes some of the bacteria, and fluoride increases the rebuilding process. Therefore, brushing with fluoride toothpaste protects.

## **Can you see caries?**

Caries begins as a white, matt spot on the tooth surface. Later, the spot darkens when a cavity has developed in the tooth. The tooth is damaged, and the body can no longer repair the damage itself. Caries lesions can also be seen in x-ray pictures.

## **Do you want to know more?**

The County Councils are responsible for providing free dental care for children and young people in Sweden until they reach the age of 23 years. The dental care is usually provided by the Public Dental Service clinics, but in most County Councils the child can also go to a private dentist free of charge. You can reach the National Dental Service's clinic via your child welfare center or via the telephone directory. On the [www.folktandvarden.se](http://www.folktandvarden.se) and [www.1177.se](http://www.1177.se) homepages, you can find more tips about how to protect your child's teeth.

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