

Getting Children to Brush Their Teeth

- When your child's teeth first come in, you should clean them with a soft cloth or gauze pad. As more teeth erupt, brush your child's teeth with a soft brush. By the time your baby is 1 year old, use a green-pea-sized amount (or less) of fluoride toothpaste. At 3 or 4 years of age, your child should be able to learn to brush on his or her own with your help. By 8 years of age, your child will probably no longer need your help. It is important that your child make brushing a habit, as this limits [tooth decay](#) and helps prevent [cavities](#).
- Although some children quickly learn to brush their teeth, others do not. If you are having trouble getting your child to brush, try some of the following suggestions.
- My, what big teeth you have! Many children have a favorite stuffed animal. Use the animal to explain why it is important to brush. Then, have your child brush the animal's teeth after brushing his or her own teeth. This may also work with a favorite doll or action figure.
- Monkey see, monkey do. Brush your teeth together with your child and do it in stages. You wet your brush, then your child wets his or her brush. You put toothpaste on your brush, then your child does. You brush your left-hand lower teeth, then your child takes a turn. Follow this pattern until you finish. You can make this more fun by making silly faces or using funny brush strokes that your child imitates. You can also switch roles and let your child lead the brushing.
- Time is on my side. Many children respond well to using an hourglass timer or an egg timer. Find a timer that lasts for as long as you feel is necessary, and have your child brush until the time is up. Humming a favorite song while brushing can also keep your child brushing longer.
- Water fountain fun. Some parents put in a "water fountain" type faucet. Many children think it's fun to brush using one of these.
- Sticks to a card, not your teeth. To reward your child for doing well, make a form that he or she can put a sticker on after brushing. Use a variety of stickers.
- You can also involve your child in dental health by letting him or her pick out a toothbrush and toothpaste. Talk to your dentist about the type of toothbrush your child needs, and steer your child in that direction. When choosing a toothpaste, stay clear of tartar-cleaning toothpastes, as they may taste bad or "sting" a young child's mouth. Be sure you pick out a fluoride toothpaste. Ask your child if he or she likes the toothpaste, and change it if this is not the case.

- Also, teach your children to spit out the toothpaste and not swallow it.
- Most importantly, set a good example. Children imitate their parents, and if your child sees that you don't brush, don't seem to enjoy brushing, or do it too quickly, he or she might well do the same.

