

strong
teeth

strong
body

strong
mind

a teaching guide for

Health Care Workers

Indigenous oral health

Indigenous children appear to experience worse oral health than non Indigenous children. The Kimberley Dental team has found that up to 75% of primary school children in remote East Kimberley Aboriginal communities have widespread decay requiring treatment urgently or within 6 months. This is similar to the rates reported by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

General health and healthy teeth

Oral health affects physical health and certain diseases can impact on oral health:

- If children or adults do not have healthy teeth, they cannot eat a healthy diet – which can lead to obesity, malnutrition and chronic diseases.
- Children who have tooth decay can't eat, talk, sleep or learn properly.
- Once there is infection in teeth, this can lead to septicaemia and acute illness requiring hospitalisation.
- The infection in teeth can contribute to infections that affect the heart and kidneys.
- People with diabetes and those on some psychiatric medication are more prone to dental problems.
- No one feels good about themselves if they can't smile.



Tooth decay



Bacteria in the mouth join with the sugars in food and drinks to make acids that can eat into teeth causing decay.

Decay in teeth (cavities) does not get better on its own and can lead to infection and pain. The dentist or therapist can repair small cavities by removing decay and placing a filling but, if the cavity is very large or there is too much infection the tooth will need to be extracted.

Gum disease

As well as causing decay, bacteria can make the gums inflamed, with redness and bleeding. Daily gentle brushing can help make gums strong and healthy again.

Good tucker

Growing kids need healthy food and drinks to grow strong bones and teeth *and* a strong heart, body and mind.

Local food like fruit and vegetables and bush tucker is best for everyone.

Plain water is best to drink and can also be used to rinse out after eating and drinking sweet food.



Cleaning teeth

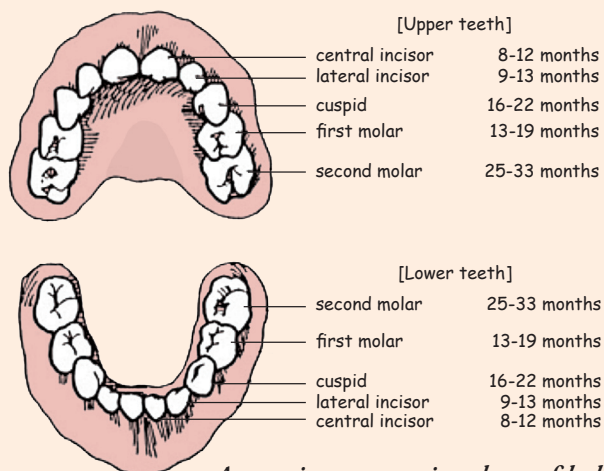
- Teeth should be cleaned thoroughly at least once a day, but twice is much more effective.
- Effective brushing should take 2-3 minutes.
- Babies and small children need help to brush properly.
- All surfaces of the teeth and along the gums should be gently brushed; on the inside, the outside and along the chewing surfaces of all teeth.
- Soft toothbrushes are best and should be replaced every 3 months.
- Only a small amount of fluoride toothpaste is needed and teeth can still be brushed with water if no toothpaste is available.
- Toothpaste should be spat out – not swallowed or rinsed off.

Strong teeth for mothers and babies

Babies' teeth are being formed before they are born. If pregnant women eat healthy, nutritious food their baby's teeth will be stronger.

There are 20 baby teeth and they need to last until children are 12 years old. It is important to clean baby's teeth with a soft cloth or toothbrush from the time they first appear.

Breast milk is the best food for babies. Sugary foods and drinks can cause decay in baby teeth, only water or milk should be given in a baby bottle.



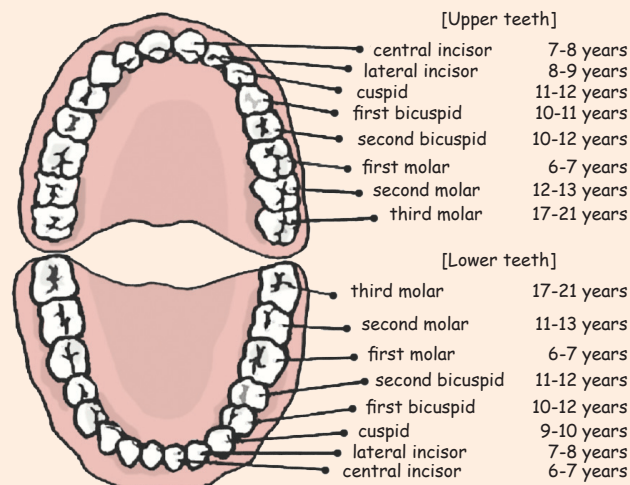
Approximate eruption dates of baby teeth. The buds of baby teeth are forming during pregnancy.

Strong teeth for kids

Baby teeth start to become loose and fall out when children are about 6 years old. Baby teeth continue to fall out for a few years and permanent teeth gradually appear between the ages of 7 and 13.

Infections in baby teeth can affect permanent teeth before they appear so it is important to look after baby teeth as well. Baby teeth also guide the development and positioning of permanent teeth.

Permanent teeth need to last for a person's whole life, so it is important to keep teeth clean and gums healthy.



Approximate eruption dates of adult teeth.



Strong teeth for adults

Adults need to look after their teeth so they can keep eating, talking and smiling into old age.

Tooth decay will cause pain and general illness. Adults with diabetes are more likely to have dental problems.

Wisdom teeth can cause pain and other problems as they come through. If there is not enough room, they should be taken out by a dentist. If there is enough room, careful brushing and weak salt washes will help them come through.

Oral health education

Do

- Provide toothbrushes and information about oral health to adults and children when you do health checks*.
- Remind parents that breast milk is best and that only milk and water should be given to babies in bottles.
- Provide toothbrushes to adults and children when they are admitted to hospital and let them take them home so they can keep brushing*.
- Look in the mouths of adults and children when conducting general health checks. People may not complain of dental pain because they have it all the time but a quick look can sometimes show multiple cavities, broken teeth, infection and swollen gums.
- Help people with dental disease access affordable treatment.

Don't

- Tell people to clean their teeth unless you can help them access toothpaste and toothbrushes. Ideally provide a pack*.
- Blame people if they already have advanced decay – they need both treatment and education to help them maintain a healthy mouth.

* To access stock of toothbrushes and toothpaste, contact the Kimberley Dental Team, Kimberley Population Health Unit or Dental Health Services (DHS: 08 9313 0604/5).
Educational material: www.dental.wa.gov.au