



Healthy choices for your mouth

Information for patients

This information sheet provides advice on looking after your mouth. It includes suggestions on how to live healthily, including food and drink choices, stopping smoking and reducing alcohol. If you have any other questions, concerns or notice any changes in your mouth, please speak to the dental team caring for you.

Why are the lifestyle choices I make important for my mouth?

As with our general health, our lifestyles can affect the health of our mouths. This includes what we put in our mouths and bodies.

Sugar is the leading cause of tooth decay, as well as long-term health conditions, such as diabetes and heart disease. Choosing healthy food and drinks helps to keep our mouth and body feeling well.

Stopping smoking and reducing alcohol intake will help improve the health of your mouth and general health by reducing your risk of cancer, including mouth cancer.

What healthy food and drink choices can I make?

Limiting sugary food and drinks will help prevent tooth decay. Some examples of healthy food and drink are:

- fresh fruit
- vegetables
- cheese (as part of a healthy diet or in moderation)
- savoury crackers
- plain oat cakes
- plain unsweetened yoghurt
- milk
- water

Where possible, opt for fresh foods that aren't processed.

Sugar swaps are an easy way to swap your sugary snacks and drinks for healthier ones. For example, swapping a flavoured fromage frais yoghurt to plain greek yoghurt with fresh fruit.

Swapping sugary drinks for plain water or milk is another great sugar swap. Gradually reduce the amount of sugar in tea and coffee and aim to cut it out altogether.

How much is too much sugar?

The recommended daily amount of sugar for adults is no more than 30g of sugar in a day. This is roughly the same as seven cubes of sugar. Download the NHS Food Scanner app to help bring food labels to life and find out how much sugar is really in the food and drinks you have: www.nhs.uk/healthier-families/

How can stopping smoking and reducing alcohol intake help my mouth?

Stopping smoking and reducing the amount of alcohol you drink is one of the hardest changes to make. However, with the right support you could lower your risk of mouth cancer, as well as other mouth problems, such as bad breath.

Where can I get help to stop smoking?

You are three times more likely to stop smoking with support from your local stop smoking service.

If you would like to stop smoking, speak to your GP or your dentist. They will be able to direct you to stop smoking services. Alternatively, find your nearest stop smoking service via www.nhs.uk/better-health/quit-smoking

Where can I get help to reduce my alcohol intake?

It is recommended that you don't consume more than 14 units of alcohol per week. Spread this across the week with a few dry days to allow your mouth and body time to recover.

If you are concerned about your drinking, you can speak to your GP or dentist for advice and support. Information, online and telephone support can be found on the Drink Aware website: www.drinkaware.co.uk

What other healthy choices can I make for my mouth?

- Brush teeth at least twice a day (last thing at night and one other time) with a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste containing 1350 to 1500ppm of fluoride.
- Thoroughly clean teeth for at least two minutes. Carefully brush each tooth – front, back and sides, as well as the gum line.
- Spit out after brushing.
- Both manual and powered toothbrushes are effective at cleaning teeth and gums. Choose one with a small head and medium bristles.
- Use dental floss or brushes that clean in between the teeth (interdental brushes) daily to remove plaque. Your dental professional can show you how to use these
- If you use a mouthwash as part of your daily routine, it is important to use it at a different time to brushing. Please discuss this with your dental professional.

- Cut down on how much and how often you have sugary food and drink:
 - ✓ fruit and vegetables are healthy snacks
 - ✓ avoid sugary drinks – milk and water are best
 - ✓ avoid sugary foods
 - ✓ use sugar-free versions of medicines if possible
- Make regular trips to the dentist.

Where can I find out further information?

drinkaware

[Alcohol support services](#)

GOV.UK

[Delivering better oral health: an evidence-based toolkit for prevention](#)

NHS.UK

[Find a dentist](#)

[Find Your Local Stop Smoking Service \(LSSS\)](#)

[Healthier Families](#)

[Quit smoking](#)

[Sugar: the facts](#)

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) is a service that offers support, information and assistance to patients, relatives and visitors. They can also provide help and advice if you have a concern or complaint that staff have not been able to resolve for you. They can also pass on praise or thanks to our teams.

PALS at King's College Hospital, Denmark Hill, London SE5 9RS

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PALS at Princess Royal University Hospital, Farnborough Common, Orpington, Kent

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If you would like the information in this leaflet in a different language or format, please contact our Communications and Interpreting telephone line on 020 3299 4826 or email kch-tr.accessibility@nhs.net