

Dental care for your child with sickle cell disease

Children with sickle cell disease are at risk of sickle cell crisis. This is a painful, serious condition typically triggered by pain and infection. It usually results in admission to hospital and urgent medical treatment. This leaflet aims to give you dental advice to help prevent that from happening.

Why is dental health important for my child?

Tooth decay is largely a preventable disease. Dental pain and infection from untreated tooth decay could result in crisis occurring.



Example of advanced dental decay

What is tooth decay and what causes it?

Tooth decay occurs when sugar from our foods and drinks is turned into acid by bacteria that live in the plaque on our teeth.

At first the enamel (hardest outer layer of the tooth) is softened, but if the acid continues to be produced frequently, the enamel will break down and a cavity (a hole) will form.

Untreated tooth decay can cause pain and infection and result in your child becoming very unwell.

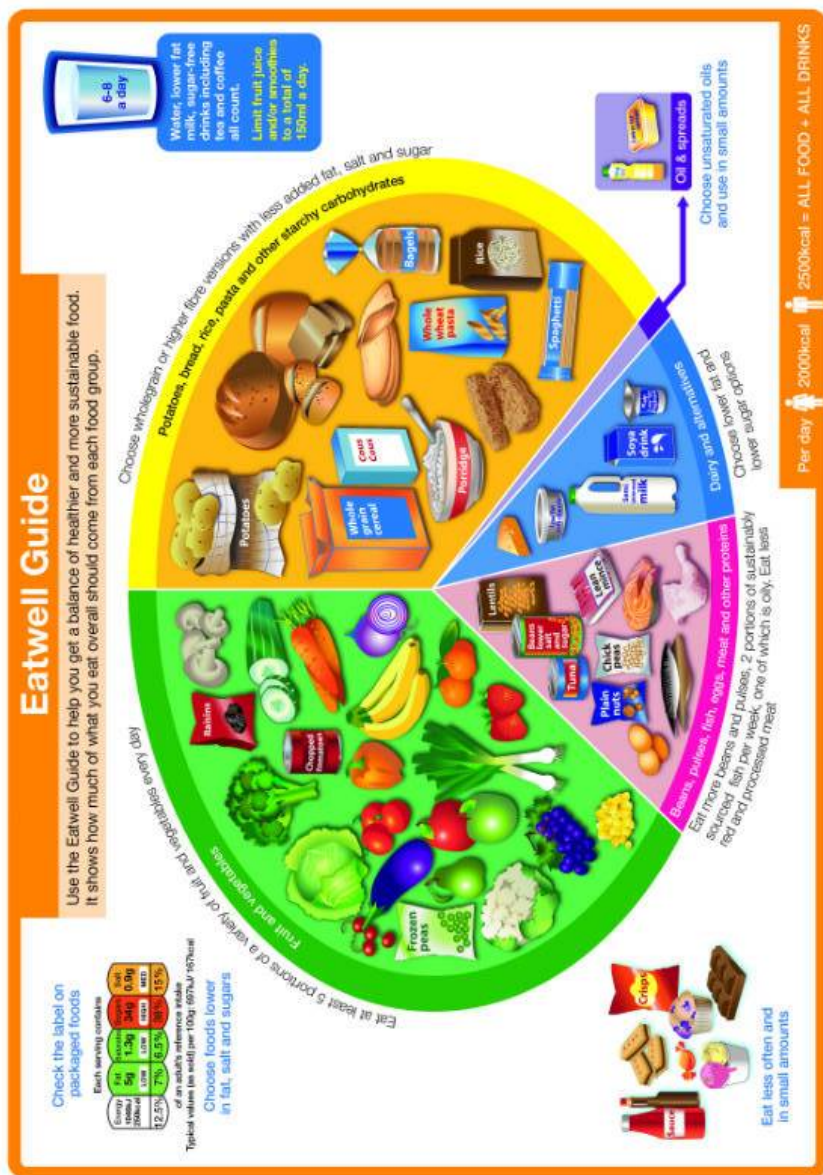
How can I prevent this from happening?

Decay can be prevented as follows:

1. Diet

- Keep sugars to meal times – this includes naturally occurring sugars (for example, fruit) and added sugars
- Safe snacks to eat between meals include cheese, crackers, raw fruit and vegetables.
- Stop bottle feeding by one year.
- Please speak to your dentist for advice about fissure sealants. Your dentist will be able to provide plastic coatings which are placed into the biting surface of a tooth. This protects the tooth from decay.

This diagram illustrates the Balance of Good Health.



Remember... it is not the **amount** of sugar you eat or drink, but **how often** you do it that is important. Restrict sweet foods or drinks to mealtimes.

2. Brushing teeth

- Help brush your child's teeth twice a day.
- Brushing before bed is particularly important.
- Spit out the toothpaste but do not rinse with water or mouthwash afterwards, so the fluoride can stay for longer
- Under three-year-olds: use a smear of toothpaste
- Over three-year-olds: use a pea-sized amount.

3. Fluoride

- This can be found in toothpaste and mouthwash as well as varnish applied by the dentist.
- You can use an alcohol-free mouthwash for children over seven years old. Use it at a different time to brushing the teeth, for example, when they get in from school.

What is dental erosion and what causes this?

Acidic food and drink can be harmful to teeth. The acids wear away the enamel and this is called erosion. This can cause 'thinning' of the teeth which can damage them and make them more sensitive. Citric fruits such as oranges, apples, and fresh fruit juices contain acid.

- Keep acids, for example, juice and fizzy drinks, to meal times.
- Help brush your child's teeth twice daily.
- Don't brush straight after having something acidic to eat or drink as you will brush away the softened enamel.
- Using an alcohol-free mouthwash (for children over seven years) after acid food or drink has been consumed, can help.

What is gum disease?

Gum disease (gingivitis) is inflammation of the gums, and is caused when plaque is not removed from the teeth and gums during brushing. The plaque causes the gums to become swollen and inflamed which can result in bleeding when brushing. If you notice the gums are bleeding it is important to keep brushing the area as it will reduce over time with good effective brushing. Please speak to your dentist or hygienist for advice on brushing.

Registering with a dentist

Everyone should be registered with a dentist once their teeth start to appear. Routine check-ups are essential every four to six months.

Contact us

If you have any further queries please contact us at
The Department of Paediatric Dentistry, Dental Centre,
Ground Floor, Purple Zone, South Wing, St Thomas'
Hospital, Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1 7EH,
t: 020 7188 4403.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/leaflets

Evelina London Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your child's medicines, please speak to the staff caring for them or contact our helpline.

t: 020 7188 3003 10am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

e: letstalkmedicines@gstt.nhs.uk

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints) **e:** complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

Language and accessible support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch.

t: 020 7188 8815 **e:** languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

w: www.nhs.uk



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