



Euroopan unionin  
osarahoittama

# Oral health of a 3–4-year-old child and oral care at home

3–4-vuotiaan lapsen suun terveys ja suun  
hoitaminen kotona



## Children's oral health

A child's oral health is affected by oral bacteria, nutrition, eating habits and brushing teeth habits.

Tooth decay is caused by bacteria. The bacterial infection is transmitted through saliva. With these methods you can avoid the transmission of bacteria:

- Do not put the child's food in your own mouth.
- Give your child a kiss on the cheek, not on the mouth
- The child must have their own cutlery and water bottles



A bacteria only cause a cavity in the tooth when you eat a lot and frequently sugary foods, and when the teeth are dirty.

The bacteria start working every time you eat or drink something. Immediately after eating, the tooth is momentarily softer and can develop cavities more easily. This is called an acid attack. Water is the only drink that does not cause cavities. Teeth can withstand 5–6 meals a day.

## Taking care of a child's mouth by brushing their teeth

A good foundation for oral self-care habits is created already in childhood.

Brush your child's teeth in the morning and evening. Choose a small and soft toothbrush for children.



Fluoride strengthens teeth and protects teeth from decay. Use a fluoride toothpaste for children with an age recommendation of 0-6 years. Use a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste when brushing. You can buy toothbrushes and toothpaste at grocery stores.



The child can practice brushing their teeth themselves. **However, the responsibility for brushing a child's teeth lies with an adult.** An adult must brush the child's teeth until the age of 12.

The toothbrush must be replaced with a new toothbrush at least every three months. If the bristles are worn or turned to the sides, replace the brush with a new one earlier. A toothbrush is personal.

## Oral health and eating

A regular meal rhythm supports oral health. Avoid eating between mealtimes.



The calcium in dairy products is good for your teeth. Milk is a good food drink.

The child needs a vitamin D (vitamin D3) supplement.

As a thirst quencher and between meals, the best drink is water. Water is also recommended for hobbies as a thirst quencher. If the child wakes up thirsty at night, offer them water to drink. In Finland, you can drink water directly from the tap.



Do not add sugar or honey to your child's food or drinks. The child does not need treats (sweets, pastries, biscuits, chips) or sugary drinks (juice, lemonade, cocoa). If you give treats and sugary drinks, serve them rarely and schedule them to be used with meals as a dessert.

**Eating and drinking sweets can affect appetite and cause tooth decay.**

## Using xylitol

Regularly used xylitol pastilles support oral health.

Xylitol prevents bacteria from working. Xylitol pastilles may prevent tooth decay. In addition, xylitol keeps teeth cleaner and dirt comes off more easily when brushing your teeth.

Start using xylitol with a small amount to help your child to get used to xylitol. Give 1–2 xylitol pastilles after each meal.



Xylitol pastilles may be given to children in daycare and at school after meals.

## The impact of sucking habits on the oral health of a 3- to 4-year-old child

Wean the child from breastfeeding and the pacifier/bottle at this point at the latest. Also wean your child from any other possible sucking habits (thumb, shirt sleeve or collars, sleep toy).



Long-term sucking habits affect the development of bite. In addition, long-term use of these can have an impact on speech development. You can get help and support for weaning from sucking habits at the dental clinic.

## Oral health check-ups

Take your child for an oral health check-up at regular intervals. An oral health check-up provides you with information about your child's oral development and oral health. During the visit, you will receive advice on how to take care of your child's mouth, and you can discuss other concerns related to oral health.

It is advisable for a child to have an oral health check-up once when the child is 3–4 years old.





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## Niitty 2 -project 2023-2026

Working together with immigrant  
families for a better everyday life

More information about the project:  
<https://projects.tuni.fi/niitty2/>

Family Info material portal:  
[tuni.fi/perheinfo](https://tuni.fi/perheinfo)

This guidance sheet is mainly based on the following sources of  
information :

Caries (control). Current Care Guidelines. A working group appointed by  
the Finnish Medical Society Duodecim and the Finnish Dental Society  
Apollonia. Helsinki: Finnish Medical Society Duodecim, 2020 (retrieved  
28.3.2025). Available online: [www.kaypahoito.fi](http://www.kaypahoito.fi)

Illustration: Drawing by students of Luovi Vocational College page 3.  
Adobe Stock on page 6.  
Other photos produced in the Niitty2 project.



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