



Euroopan unionin
osarahoittama

Guide to choosing a toothbrush and toothpaste

Opas hammasharjan ja hammastahnan
valintaan



A good foundation for oral self-care habits is laid in early childhood. The first baby tooth usually erupts at around 4–12 months of age. **Start brushing the child's teeth together morning and evening as soon as the first tooth erupts.**



By around the age of 3, a child has a total of 20 baby teeth. The last baby teeth may not be replaced by permanent teeth until the teenage years. When teeth are erupting, the gums may be tender, and brushing may cause a small amount of bleeding. This is normal. Teeth should still be brushed carefully morning and evening. Not brushing will make the situation worse.

A child can start practising brushing their teeth as soon as they want to. **Responsibility for brushing the child's teeth lies with an adult until lower secondary school age.**

Choosing a toothbrush

Manual toothbrush

A manual toothbrush is recommended as a child's first toothbrush. Choose a toothbrush with a small, soft brush head. Select a toothbrush with the label "soft" or "extra soft" on the packaging. The packaging also shows the recommended age range for using the toothbrush. Follow these recommendations. If you cannot find a toothbrush with an age recommendation that matches your child, choose the younger age option. Using a toothbrush that is too large makes brushing a child's teeth difficult. The toothbrush will not fit properly in the mouth when brushing the back teeth.



The toothbrush should be replaced at least every three months. If the bristles are worn or bent, replace the brush sooner. A toothbrush is for personal use only.

When brushing with a manual toothbrush, use a small back-and-forth motion. Make sure the bristles are partly on the gum as well. Remember to brush all outer, inner and chewing surfaces. Brush both the upper and lower teeth. Spit out any toothpaste remaining in the mouth at the end of brushing. Do not rinse the mouth with water after brushing.



Note how the position of the brush changes when brushing the inner surfaces of the lower front teeth (last picture on the bottom right).

Electric toothbrush

You can start using an electric toothbrush once the first baby molar has erupted. If brushing is challenging, or if an adult is unable to clean a child's teeth properly with a regular toothbrush, you can try an electric toothbrush earlier.



Children have their own electric toothbrushes. Children's electric toothbrushes have a lower rotation speed than those intended for adults. This makes them more comfortable for children to use.

Choose a children's brush head for your child's electric toothbrush. Electric toothbrushes for children do not have age recommendations for brush heads; the brush heads are the same size for children of all ages. A small, soft, and round brush head is recommended. The same electric toothbrush handle can be used by several children, but the brush head is personal.



The brush head should be replaced with a new one at least every three months. If the bristles are worn or bent to the sides, replace the brush head earlier.

When brushing with an electric toothbrush, hold the toothbrush in place on a tooth while slowly counting to three. Then move the toothbrush to the next tooth and repeat. Make sure the bristles are partly on the gum as well. Remember to brush all outer, inner and chewing surfaces. Brush both the upper and lower teeth. Spit out any toothpaste remaining in the mouth at the end of brushing. Do not rinse the mouth with water after brushing.



Note how the position of the brush changes when brushing the inner surfaces of the lower front teeth (last picture on the bottom right).

Choosing toothpaste

Choose a toothpaste for your child that contains fluoride. Fluoride strengthens the teeth. The amount of fluoride in toothpaste is indicated by the ppm marking. Using fluoride toothpaste is safe when it is used according to the instructions and in the correct amount. Choose a fluoride toothpaste appropriate for the child's age.

For children under the age of 3, a smear of fluoride toothpaste is applied to the toothbrush. The fluoride concentration of the toothpaste should be 1000–1100 ppm.



For children aged 3–5, a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste is used. The fluoride concentration of the toothpaste should be 1000–1100 ppm.



For children aged 6 and over, a 0.5–2 cm strip of fluoride toothpaste is applied. The fluoride concentration of the toothpaste should be 1,450 ppm.



Toothpastes come in different flavours. If a toothpaste tastes unpleasant to a child, they may refuse to brush their teeth. If brushing is challenging, try different flavours. It is important that the toothpaste tastes good to the child.

Toothpastes intended for adults that have a whitening effect or affect the formation of tartar are not suitable toothpastes for children.



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Niitty 2 project 2023-2026

Working together with immigrant
families for a better everyday life

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

Perheinfo information portal:
tuni.fi/perheinfo

This guide is mainly based on the following sources of information:
Dental caries (management). Current Care guideline. Working group appointed by the Finnish Medical Society Duodecim and the Finnish Dental Society Apollonia. Helsinki: Finnish Medical Society Duodecim, 2020 (accessed 28 March 2025). Available online at: www.kaypahoito.fi

Illustrations: Adobe Stock image bank on page 2.
Other images produced as part of the Niitty 2 project.



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