

This month at ...

COTTINGHAM
DENTAL PRACTICE



Clean your teeth before breakfast

Do you brush your teeth before or after breakfast? For most of us, our teeth cleaning habits haven't changed since childhood; it can often take quite a while for new research to filter through and affect our habits.

"It can be hard information to get across," said Dr Ben Atkins of the Oral Health Foundation. "Think about who taught you to brush your teeth. I'm 47, so for me it was a generation born in the 1940s, and then the people who taught them had often lost many of their own teeth."



So what should we be doing? "Brush your teeth for about two minutes last thing at night before you go to bed and on one other occasion every day," is the official NHS advice. But there's more to healthy, white teeth than that.

"We need to clean our teeth before breakfast," said Siobhan Kelleher, a dental hygienist who is involved in promoting brushing techniques nationally. "It's about the pH levels in your mouth," she added. "When you eat breakfast and you introduce acidic foods, say orange juice or sugary cereal, there's then an acid attack and teeth are more vulnerable for about an hour afterwards. Brushing beforehand means your teeth have that extra protection against decay before you eat."

She also recommends using a TePe interdental brush or flossing before cleaning with a toothbrush: "When you brush your teeth, you're only cleaning 60% of their surfaces, so 40% of the bacteria, between the teeth, remains after brushing. Using an interdental brush such as

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TePe will remove it, but you'll want to use a toothbrush afterwards so that bacteria doesn't remain on the other parts of your teeth."

Most experts recommend smaller toothbrush heads, whereas the size needed for an interdental brush will vary from person to person. It is best to ask your dentist, but you could also try buying a multisize pack and seeing which works best for you.

Fluoridated toothpaste is an essential. "The most important thing to look for is the concentration of fluoride parts per million (ppm)," explained Dr Atkins. This must be listed on toothpaste, in the same way as nutritional information on foods, or SPF on sunscreen. Most brands carry it in small print on the back. Children under three are OK with 1,000 fluoride ppm but for older children and adults, you want between 1,350ppm and 1,500ppm.

And the really important thing is not to rinse your mouth out once you're done. That's just getting rid of all the fluoride you've spent two minutes adding to your mouth.

But what about the times we slip up? It takes 24 hours for the gum disease process to start, so when we wake up we've still got a chance to redeem ourselves. Remember: clean with an interdental brush first, then apply protective fluoride with your toothbrush and give your teeth a good going over. Spit, but don't rinse. Finally, smile!

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Cottingham Dental Practice, 190-192 King Street,
Cottingham, East Yorkshire, HU16 5QJ
Tel: 01482 848655

Visit our website at
www.cottinghamdental.co.uk

 @CottinghamDentalPractice