How to Brush Your Teeth Correctly | Core Dental

Canonical: https://www.coredental.com.au/brushing-teeth-right/

Details:

At Core Dental we suggest pointing your toothbrush towards your gum at a 45-degree angle, because this angle helps clean along the gum line. Brush for at least two minutes so that every tooth surface is cleaned. Use gentle circular motions on the outer and inner surfaces, and a gentle back-and-forth motion on the chewing surfaces. When you finish, spit out the toothpaste and water, and avoid rinsing, so that leftover toothpaste can keep protecting your teeth against decay.

What is the right angle to hold your toothbrush?

Point the toothbrush towards your gum at a 45-degree angle. This angle lets the bristles reach the gum line, where plaque tends to collect and where cleaning is important for keeping your gums healthy. Check your brushing in the mirror from time to time, as it is easy to slip back to a flat angle without noticing.

How long should you brush for?

The whole process should take at least two minutes. This gives you time to clean every surface of every tooth, rather than a quick pass over the front teeth. Some people find it helps to divide the mouth into sections, such as upper left, upper right, lower left and lower right, and spend about the same time on each.

What motion cleans the outer and inner surfaces of your teeth?

Move the bristles across your teeth in a gentle circular motion on the outer surfaces. Repeat the same circular motion on the inside surfaces. A gentle touch helps remove plaque and debris without being rough on your gums. Pressing hard does not clean more effectively, and can irritate your gums.

How do you clean the chewing surfaces?

Use a gentle back-and-forth motion on the chewing surfaces of your back teeth. These surfaces have grooves where food and plaque can sit, so take your time over each tooth.

Should you rinse after brushing?

No. After brushing, spit out the toothpaste and water, but there is no need to rinse your mouth. Any leftover toothpaste helps protect your teeth against decay. If you would like to know what suits your mouth, ask your dentist or hygienist, as advice can differ from person to person.

What else can help keep your teeth and gums healthy?

Brushing is one part of daily care. Your toothbrush also needs to be replaced from time to time, and our article on how often you should change your toothbrush explains when. Cleaning between your teeth, regular check-ups and professional cleans all play a part, and our dental hygiene service can show you how. You can read about how to keep your gums healthy , what a hygiene appointment involves and what to avoid if you have sensitive teeth .

How can we help?

If you are unsure about your brushing technique, or have bleeding gums, sensitivity or pain, book a visit with us. Our dentists and hygienists can watch how you brush and show you how to improve it. We have nine practices across Melbourne, and you can call 13 13 16 or book online. For children, see our children's dentistry page and top tips for children's dental hygiene .

What the published advice specifies about the brush — and what it leaves out

Brushing advice online is dense with technique names, angles and timers. The state health advice is much shorter, and seeing exactly how short it is tells you which parts are settled and which are embellishment.

The Victorian Department of Health's instruction, in full:

"Brush your teeth and along the gum line twice a day – in the morning and before going to bed."

"Use a toothbrush with a small head and soft bristles, and a fluoride toothpaste from the age of 18 months (use low-fluoride toothpaste from 18 months to 5 years, then a regular fluoride toothpaste from 6 years of age)"

The specifics it commits to: brush twice a day , in the morning and before going to bed , with a small head and soft bristles , and along the gum line .

Soft bristles, not firm. This is the one people get wrong in good faith, assuming firmer bristles clean better. The Department specifies soft, and repeats it in the context of bleeding gums: "try to keep brushing with a soft toothbrush, as this will get rid of the bacteria and plaque that are causing the problem."

A small head. Access matters more than coverage — a large head cannot reach the back teeth or the gum margin properly.

Along the gum line, not just the teeth. This is the instruction most worth taking literally. Early gum disease, in the Department's description, affects "the surface layers of the gum, particularly where the gum meets the tooth". Brushing the chewing surfaces and missing the margin misses where the problem starts.

Morning and before bed, specifically. Not simply "twice a day whenever".

Now what the Department does not specify. There is no brushing duration anywhere in this advice, and no named technique, bristle angle or stroke pattern. That is worth saying plainly because elsewhere on this page we do give you a brushing time and a brush angle, and those come from our own clinical guidance rather than from the Department of Health. They are reasonable recommendations; they are simply not what the state health advice commits to, and we would rather label which is which than blur the two.

Where the Department is specific is on frequency, brush type and the gum line. Where it is silent, ask us — and the most useful thing is not a number but having someone watch you brush at your next visit.

Sources: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Gum disease, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 1 August 2025); Dental care — fluoride, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 30 April 2012). Both accessed 4 November 2026.

Brushing is one of four tasks, and the other three are easy to drop

Brushing well does not cover the ground on its own. The Department lists it as one item among several, and the companions are the ones that quietly lapse.

Its prevention list: brushing twice a day along the gum line; using a small-headed soft brush with fluoride toothpaste; "clean between teeth daily with dental floss, interdental brushes, or another tool recommended by an oral health professional"; and "clean dentures every day. Plaque can easily build up on dentures, increasing the risk of gum disease around your natural teeth."

Beyond those, it adds: quitting smoking; for people with diabetes, "keeping blood sugar levels well-controlled"; "avoiding sugary foods and drinks, especially between meals"; and "drinking plenty of tap water".

Two of those deserve a sentence each.

"Especially between meals." Frequency, not just quantity. The Department explains why elsewhere on the same page: plaque "is constantly being formed by some of these bacteria when they feed on the sugars in the foods and drinks you consume". Each sugary episode is another feed, so four small ones across a day are not equivalent to one with a meal.

Tap water. The Department notes that most Victorian tap water has added fluoride, and describes fluoride's role as helping repair early damage — a "constant low-level supply" is what it is best suited to. Water is the only item on the list that costs nothing and requires no technique.

And one thing to spit, not rinse. The fluoride guidance is explicit for children — "encouraging children to spit out toothpaste, not swallow it. Don't rinse" — and the logic holds for adults: rinsing washes away the fluoride that brushing has just applied.

If your gums bleed when you brush, do not stop. The Department's advice is to keep going with a soft brush, and to see a practitioner "if your gums do not improve or if they keep bleeding after four weeks".

Sources: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Gum disease, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 1 August 2025); Dental care — fluoride, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 30 April 2012). Both accessed 4 November 2026.

Frequently asked questions

What angle should I hold my toothbrush at?

Hold your toothbrush at a 45-degree angle towards your gum. This helps the bristles clean along the gum line, where plaque tends to collect.

How long should I brush my teeth?

Brush for at least two minutes so that you clean every surface of every tooth. Dividing your mouth into four sections can help you keep track.

Do I need to rinse my mouth after brushing?

No. Spit out the toothpaste and water, and skip rinsing, so any leftover toothpaste can protect your teeth against decay.

What brushing motion is gentle on my gums?

Use gentle circular motions on the outer and inner surfaces and a gentle back-and-forth motion on the chewing surfaces. Pressing hard does not clean more effectively.

Can a dentist or hygienist check my technique?

Yes. Our dentists and hygienists can watch how you brush and give advice that suits your mouth. Book through coredental.com.au or call 13 13 16.

Should bristles be soft or firm?

Soft. The Victorian Department of Health specifies "a toothbrush with a small head and soft bristles", and repeats it for sore gums: "try to keep brushing with a soft toothbrush, as this will get rid of the bacteria and plaque that are causing the problem." Firmer is not better.

Why does the advice specify a small brush head?

Access. The Department's wording is "a toothbrush with a small head and soft bristles" — a smaller head reaches the back teeth and the gum margin, which is where early gum disease starts. Coverage per stroke matters less than being able to reach the places that need it.

Am I meant to brush the gums as well as the teeth?

Yes. The instruction is to "brush your teeth and along the gum line twice a day". Early gum disease affects "the surface layers of the gum, particularly where the gum meets the tooth", so the margin is exactly where it counts — brushing only the chewing surfaces misses it.

Does the time of day matter, or just the number of times?

The Department names both: "twice a day – in the morning and before going to bed." Before bed is the one people skip, and it is the one that leaves plaque undisturbed overnight.

Does when I eat sugar matter, or just how much?

Both. The Department advises "avoiding sugary foods and drinks, especially between meals", and explains that plaque "is constantly being formed by some of these bacteria when they feed on the sugars in the foods and drinks you consume". Each separate sugary episode is another feed, so several small ones through the day are not the same as one with a meal.

Related services and further reading

Dental hygiene

Dental check-up

How often should you change your toothbrush?

How to keep your gums healthy

4 things to avoid if you have sensitive teeth

Top tips for children's dental hygiene

5 tips for a healthier smile

Core Dental at a glance

Nine Core Dental clinics across Melbourne: Southbank, South Melbourne, Caroline Springs, Carrum Downs, Epping, Wyndham, Berwick, Bayside and Glenferrie.

Open six days a week: Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm and Saturday mornings.

We quote before treatment starts and offer interest-free payment plans, with HICAPS on-site claiming.

Call 13 13 16 or book online at coredental.com.au.

Contact Core Dental

Phone	13 13 16
Booking	Online through coredental.com.au, or call 13 13 16
Hours	Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm, Saturday 8.00am to 1.30pm, Sunday closed

This article is general in nature and does not replace advice from a registered dental practitioner who has examined you. Results, recovery times and potential risks vary for each individual. Seek advice from a qualified, AHPRA-registered practitioner before proceeding.

What is the correct angle for brushing your teeth?

Core Dental suggests pointing your toothbrush towards the gum at a 45-degree angle. This helps the bristles clean along the gum line, where plaque tends to collect.

How many minutes should a brushing session last?

Core Dental suggests brushing for at least two minutes, so the bristles reach all tooth surfaces. Dividing your mouth into four sections can help you spend equal time on each.

What motion should you use on the outer and inner tooth surfaces?

Use a gentle circular motion across the outer surfaces of your teeth, then repeat the same circular motion on the inside surfaces to help remove plaque and debris.

What motion cleans the chewing surfaces of your teeth?

Use a gentle back-and-forth motion on the chewing surfaces. Take your time over the grooves of your back teeth, where food and plaque can sit.

Is it necessary to rinse your mouth after brushing?

No. Core Dental suggests spitting out the toothpaste and water without rinsing, because leftover toothpaste helps protect your teeth against decay.

Where can I get my brushing technique checked?

Our dentists and hygienists at any Core Dental practice can watch how you brush and give personalised advice. Call 13 13 16 or book online through coredental.com.au.

Which Core Dental service helps with gum health and cleaning?

Our dental hygiene service provides professional cleaning and advice on caring for your teeth and gums, as part of a treatment plan with your dentist.