How to Choose the Right Toothpaste | Core Dental

Canonical: https://www.coredental.com.au/how-do-i-know-which-toothpaste-to-use/

Details:

The right toothpaste depends on your age and your teeth. For most people, a fluoride toothpaste is the sensible starting point, because fluoride helps strengthen teeth and protect them from decay. Children under six need a lower-fluoride children's formulation, and people with sensitive teeth, stained teeth or a history of cavities may need something different. At Core Dental our dentists and hygienists can recommend a toothpaste that suits your mouth, and good brushing technique matters just as much as the product you choose.

Why is fluoride toothpaste so widely recommended?

Fluoride toothpaste is widely recommended because the decline in tooth decay (cavities) seen in many countries over recent decades is generally attributed mainly to the widespread use of fluoride toothpastes. Fluoride helps strengthen your teeth and protect them from the acids in foods and drinks. If you are choosing between products, check the label for fluoride. You can read more in what fluoride is and what it is used for and why use fluoride toothpaste .

What fluoride level should you look for if you have had cavities?

If you have had problems with cavities in the past, a toothpaste with a fluoride concentration of at least 1000 parts per million (ppm) is generally suggested. Most adult toothpastes sit around that level. Your dentist can check the product you use and advise whether you need anything extra, such as a higher-strength prescription product. Please ask before changing, as the right level depends on your age and risk of decay.

Why do children under six need a different toothpaste?

Children under six tend to swallow toothpaste while brushing. Swallowing too much fluoride while the adult teeth are forming can cause enamel fluorosis, which can show as white spots or yellow or brown discolouration. To reduce that risk, toothpastes with a lower fluoride concentration, below about 600 ppm, have been formulated for young children. They are also designed with a taste, texture and consistency that young children prefer. Supervise your child's brushing, use only a small amount, and encourage them to spit rather than swallow. Ask us about the right product for your child's age. See also white spots on a child's adult teeth .

Which toothpaste helps with sensitive teeth?

As we age, the gums can recede and expose the root surface of some teeth. In some cases this causes hypersensitivity and pain, especially with ice cream or cold drinks. Toothpaste made for sensitive teeth can help relieve this. Products vary in how they work, but many contain compounds that block the nerves in your teeth from sensing hot and cold.

Be patient: it can take up to three to four weeks to see the full effect. If you are experiencing sensitivity, see your dentist or hygienist, who can find the cause and discuss treatment options. Our guide to things to avoid if you have sensitive teeth may also help.

Does whitening toothpaste work?

Whitening toothpastes are promoted mainly for their cosmetic benefit. They may suit people whose teeth are yellowing with age or who regularly drink coffee or tea. They use silica, enzymes or small amounts of bleach to scrub the teeth and lift surface stains, giving a whiter look. They are not as effective as professional whitening at a dental practice, but they can brighten your smile to some degree. Read about professional teeth whitening .

What about toothpaste for smokers?

People who smoke are more likely to have stained teeth, so many smokers' toothpastes use strong abrasives to remove stains. Vigorous brushing with an abrasive paste can wear away enamel over time. If you see your dentist or hygienist about every six months, they can remove stains and tartar without damaging your teeth. Smoking also affects your gums and general oral health, as we explain in how smoking affects your oral health .

Are natural toothpastes a good choice?

A wide range of natural toothpastes made from herbal extracts and other natural ingredients is available. The health claims of many have not been clinically proven. Check whether the product contains fluoride, which is an established active ingredient for preventing decay. Although there are many types of toothpaste on the market, correct brushing technique is very important, together with seeing your dentist and hygienist regularly. Learn more in brushing your teeth the right way .

How can we help?

If you are not sure which toothpaste to choose, our dentists and hygienists can review your teeth and gums and recommend a product to suit you, at any of our nine Core Dental clinics. Call 13 13 16 or book online at coredental.com.au. See our dental hygiene and dental check-up pages for more information.

The age bands, stated exactly

"A different toothpaste for children" is where most pages stop. The published guidance is a set of three age bands with a specific amount for each, and the first one surprises people.

The Victorian Department of Health's bands, in its own words:

"for children 0-18 months of age - use only water, no toothpaste"

"from 18 months until the child turns six years old - use a pea-sized amount of children's toothpaste that contains fluoride (children's toothpaste has a lower level of fluoride than standard toothpaste)"

"from six years of age - use a pea-sized amount of standard fluoride toothpaste"

So the switch at six is to standard toothpaste at the same pea-sized amount — the fluoride level changes, the quantity does not. And before 18 months there is no toothpaste at all, which is the instruction most often missed. Cleaning still happens: "As soon as the first tooth appears (usually at around 6 months of age) brush gently with a soft children's toothbrush and water (no toothpaste), or

use a soft wet cloth to wipe over teeth and gums."

On flavour, which is where the arguments happen. The Department is relaxed about it and firm about the reason: "Fruit-flavoured toothpastes have become popular in recent years. Non-mint flavours are fine but always make sure toothpaste contains fluoride as this is the key ingredient that protects teeth against decay."

Flavour is negotiable. Fluoride is the thing being bought.

Two situations where the bands are not the whole answer. The Department sends both to a professional rather than giving a rule: "For children who do not have access to fluoridated water, or who have a greater risk of tooth decay for other reasons, ask your oral health professional about what kind of toothpaste is right for you." The same applies to adults — "if you're living in an area without fluoridated drinking water, speak to your dentist about what oral care products would be best for you".

Sources: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Toothbrushing - children 0-6 years, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 4 August 2026); Tooth decay, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 28 June 2025). Both accessed 6 November 2026.

The instruction that undoes good toothpaste: rinsing

You can choose the right toothpaste, use the right amount, and then cancel most of its benefit in the last three seconds at the basin. This is the single most useful thing on this page, and it is not about which tube you buy.

The Department's adult instruction: "After brushing, spit out the fluoride toothpaste - do not swallow it, and do not rinse with water. This allows the fluoride more time to strengthen your teeth."

The children's version says the same with the reason stated differently: "After brushing, ask your child to spit out the toothpaste, and not to rinse with water. The small amount of toothpaste remaining keeps protecting teeth."

Rinsing washes away the one ingredient you selected the toothpaste for. No mouthwash, no cup of water, no swilling — spit and stop.

The rest of the technique, since toothpaste only works where it is taken. The Department's adult tips:

"Clean your teeth twice a day; in the morning and before bed."

"Use a toothbrush with a small head and soft bristles and a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste."

"Gently brush teeth and along the gum line in small circles, making sure to brush each tooth on the front, back, and chewing surfaces."

Note the gum line is named as a target, not a hazard to avoid — and that gentle small circles are the method, rather than pressure.

For an electric brush , the Department's guidance is about restraint: "Guide the brush slowly across, pausing for a few seconds at each tooth. Do not press too hard or scrub, let the brush do the work." Its children's page adds the sequence worth copying with a nervous child: "Guide the brush to your child's teeth first, then switch it on."

What toothpaste cannot reach. "It is important to clean between teeth where a toothbrush can't reach. Products such as floss and interdental brushes can remove plaque from between your teeth." The Department quantifies the gap elsewhere: without flossing or an interdental brush, "up to a third of each tooth doesn't get cleaned". On which product to use it defers rather than prescribes — "talk to your oral health professional about whether you should use one of these products".

Why fluoride is the ingredient that matters. The Department's reason is mechanical rather than promotional: "Fluoride protects the teeth against acid." Tap water does some of the same work, which is why the advice pairs the two: use "toothpaste that contains fluoride and drinking tap water if you're living in an area with fluoride in the drinking water". The National Health and Medical Research

Council's position on the water side is that "in Australia, community water fluoridation programs are considered a safe and effective way of reducing tooth decay across the population".

And what no toothpaste does. It does not substitute for having a look. "The early signs of dental disease can be difficult to see. An oral health professional is trained to spot and treat any problems early, which can prevent bigger problems developing." How often is a question for your own clinician: "Ask your oral health professional how often you should have a dental check-up."

Sources: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Teeth and mouth care, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 25 July 2025); Toothbrushing - children 0-6 years, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 4 August 2026); National Health and Medical Research Council, Health effects of water fluoridation, nhmrc.gov.au . All accessed 6 November 2026.

Frequently asked questions

Do I need a fluoride toothpaste?

Most people benefit from one, as fluoride helps strengthen teeth and protect them from decay. Check the label, and ask your dentist or hygienist if you are unsure which product suits you or your family.

What toothpaste should my young child use?

Children under six should use a toothpaste made for young children, with a lower fluoride level, and only a small amount. Help them brush and encourage them to spit. Ask our dentists to confirm what suits your child's age.

How long does sensitive toothpaste take to work?

It can take around three to four weeks of regular use to see the full effect, so some patience is needed. If sensitivity continues, see your dentist, because it can have causes that need treatment.

Can whitening toothpaste replace professional whitening?

No. Whitening toothpaste can lift surface stains and brighten your smile somewhat, but it is not as effective as professional whitening by a dentist. Think of it as a way to maintain your smile between visits.

How often should I see a dentist or hygienist?

Many people are advised to visit about every six months, but your dentist will recommend the interval that suits your oral health. Regular professional cleans remove stains and tartar that brushing cannot.

Should I rinse my mouth after brushing?

No. The Victorian Department of Health's instruction is to "spit out the fluoride toothpaste - do not swallow it, and do not rinse with water", because this "allows the fluoride more time to strengthen your teeth". Rinsing washes away the ingredient the toothpaste was chosen for.

How much toothpaste should a child use, and from what age?

The Department gives three bands: "for children 0-18 months of age - use only water, no toothpaste"; "from 18 months until the child turns six years old - use a pea-sized amount of children's toothpaste that contains fluoride"; and "from six years of age - use a pea-sized amount of standard fluoride toothpaste". The amount stays pea-sized across both older bands — it is the fluoride level that changes.

Is fruit-flavoured toothpaste alright?

Yes, with one condition. "Non-mint flavours are fine but always make sure toothpaste contains fluoride as this is the key ingredient that protects teeth against decay."

How much toothpaste should an adult use?

The Department's adult guidance is the same amount: "a toothbrush with a small head and soft bristles and a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste".

What if my tap water is not fluoridated?

The Department does not give a product rule for this case; it sends you to a clinician. For adults: "If you're living in an area without fluoridated drinking water, speak to your dentist about what oral care products would be best for you." For children the same applies, and it extends further: "For children who do not have access to fluoridated water, or who have a greater risk of tooth decay for other reasons, ask your oral health professional about what kind of toothpaste is right for you."

Does toothpaste clean between my teeth?

No. "It is important to clean between teeth where a toothbrush can't reach. Products such as floss and interdental brushes can remove plaque from between your teeth." Without one of those, the Department says, "up to a third of each tooth doesn't get cleaned". Which product suits you is something to "talk to your oral health professional about".

Am I brushing too hard with an electric brush?

Possibly. The Department's guidance is to "guide the brush slowly across, pausing for a few seconds at each tooth" and to "not press too hard or scrub, let the brush do the work". With a child, it suggests guiding the brush to the teeth first and switching it on afterwards.

What is fluoride actually doing?

"Fluoride protects the teeth against acid." That is the Department's own summary. On fluoridated water, the National Health and Medical Research Council states that "in Australia, community water fluoridation programs are considered a safe and effective way of reducing tooth decay across the population".

Can the right toothpaste replace a check-up?

No. "The early signs of dental disease can be difficult to see. An oral health professional is trained to spot and treat any problems early, which can prevent bigger problems developing." On timing the Department does not set a universal interval: "Ask your oral health professional how often you should have a dental check-up."

Related services and further reading

Dental hygiene

Dental check-ups

What is fluoride and what is it used for?

Why use fluoride toothpaste?

Brushing your teeth the right way

How often should you change your toothbrush?

4 things to avoid if you have sensitive teeth

Teeth whitening

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, with interest-free payment plans and HICAPS on-site claiming.

Call 13 13 16 or book online.

Contact Core Dental

Phone	13 13 16
Booking	Online via coredental.com.au, or call 13 13 16
Hours	Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm, Saturday mornings, Sunday closed
Clinics	Southbank , South Melbourne , Caroline Springs , Carrum Downs , Epping , Wyndham , Berwick , Bayside , Glenferrie

Results, recovery times and potential risks vary for each individual. This information is general in nature and is intended for people over 18. Seek advice from a qualified, AHPRA-registered practitioner before proceeding.

What toothpaste does Core Dental recommend for most adults?

For most adults our Core Dental team recommends a fluoride toothpaste, because fluoride helps strengthen teeth and protect them from decay. Ask us if you want advice based on your own teeth.

What fluoride concentration helps if I have had cavities?

A concentration of at least 1000 ppm is generally suggested for people with a history of cavities. Core Dental dentists can check your current toothpaste and advise whether you need anything more.

Why is children's toothpaste different?

Children under six tend to swallow toothpaste, which can cause enamel fluorosis, so lower-fluoride children's formulas are made for them. Core Dental dentists can advise on the right product for your child's age.

How does toothpaste for sensitive teeth work?

Many sensitive-teeth toothpastes contain compounds that block nerves from sensing hot and cold. Full benefit can take three to four weeks, and Core Dental dentists can look for the cause if sensitivity continues.

What is whitening toothpaste good for?

Whitening toothpaste can lift surface stains from coffee, tea or ageing using silica, enzymes or small amounts of bleach. It is not as effective as professional whitening available at Core Dental.

Are natural toothpastes proven to work?

The health claims of many natural toothpastes are not clinically proven. Our Core Dental team suggests checking whether they contain fluoride, an established ingredient for preventing decay.

Who can help me choose a toothpaste at Core Dental?

Our dentists and hygienists can review your teeth and gums and recommend a suitable toothpaste. Call 13 13 16 or book online at coredental.com.au for an appointment at your nearest clinic.