Why Use Fluoride Toothpaste? Benefits Explained | Core Dental

Canonical: https://www.coredental.com.au/use-fluoride-toothpaste/

Details:

Fluoride toothpaste contains fluoride, a mineral that acts as a topical agent on the surface of your teeth. It helps protect the tooth surface from decay and acid erosion by strengthening tooth enamel and making it more resistant to acid attacks. At Core Dental we recommend brushing with a fluoride toothpaste as part of everyday home care, alongside regular check-ups. Your dentist can advise which toothpaste suits you or your child.

How does fluoride protect your teeth?

Fluoride strengthens tooth enamel, making it more resistant to acid attacks. When fluoride toothpaste is applied to the tooth surface or mixes with your saliva, the enamel takes up the mineral. Over time this strengthening makes the enamel less susceptible to acid damage from bacteria and from acids found in soft drinks, citrus fruit and stomach acid reflux.

Fluoride works at the surface of the tooth, which is why it is called a topical agent. You do not need to swallow it for it to help your teeth. Spit out the toothpaste after brushing rather than rinsing it away with lots of water, so a little fluoride stays in contact with your teeth.

Does fluoride affect the bacteria in your mouth?

Yes. Fluoride reduces the ability of bacteria in dental plaque to produce the acids that cause decay. Every time you eat or drink something sugary or acidic, the mouth becomes more acidic for a while, and enamel can lose minerals. Fluoride supports the natural process that returns minerals to the enamel, and it limits how much acid the bacteria can make in the first place.

This is one reason we encourage regular, thorough brushing, cleaning between your teeth and sensible snacking habits as well. Fluoride is a helpful part of prevention, but it does not replace brushing technique or professional care.

Can fluoride help with tooth sensitivity?

Yes. Used as a topical agent in the mouth, fluoride can decrease tooth sensitivity, also called hypersensitivity. Sensitivity often happens when the outer surface of a tooth has worn or the root surface is exposed, so strengthening the tooth surface can help to reduce discomfort for some people.

If your teeth are sensitive, tell your dentist. Sensitivity can also be a sign of decay, a cracked tooth or gum recession, and a dentist needs to examine you to find the cause. Some people are advised to use a higher-strength fluoride product or a toothpaste made for sensitive teeth, but this should be your dentist's recommendation after an examination.

What fluoride concentration does toothpaste usually contain?

Most fluoride toothpastes on the market contain between 1000 and 1450 parts per million (ppm) of fluoride. The concentration is usually printed on the tube or packaging. Toothpaste for young children is often made with a lower concentration, and the amount used should be small. Ask your dentist or our team what is suitable for your child, because recommendations depend on your child's age and their risk of decay.

How should you use fluoride toothpaste?

These general habits are commonly recommended:

Brush twice a day, in the morning and before bed, with a soft toothbrush.

Use a small amount of toothpaste. Adults can use a pea-sized amount, and children need a smaller smear or pea-sized amount depending on their age.

Spit out the toothpaste after brushing and avoid rinsing straight away.

Supervise young children while they brush so they do not swallow the toothpaste.

Clean between your teeth each day, because toothbrush bristles do not reach every surface.

Your dentist or hygienist can show you a brushing technique that suits your mouth.

How do you plan your care with our team?

A useful first step is to explain your concern, symptoms, timing and goals when you book. Bring relevant medical information and a current medicines list. Your dentist can then assess your teeth, gums, bite and surrounding tissues, request imaging when clinically appropriate, and explain which options are suitable.

Ask what the recommended approach is intended to achieve, whether there are reasonable alternatives, what preparation and aftercare involve, and what risks or limitations apply. Treatment time, fees, recovery and maintenance vary with the diagnosis and the complexity of care. A written treatment plan can help you compare stages, expected appointments and payment arrangements before you proceed.

Call 000 immediately for uncontrollable bleeding, breathing or swallowing difficulty, serious facial injury or other life-threatening symptoms. Do not wait for a dental appointment in these situations. For severe tooth pain or swelling without these emergency signs, contact us promptly. Prevention and review intervals should be tailored to your individual oral health risks rather than assumed to be the same for everyone.

How can we help?

If you would like advice on toothpaste, sensitivity or protecting your family's teeth, our team can help at any of our nine Core Dental practices. Call 13 13 16 or book online. You can also read about our general dentistry services and children's dentistry .

Further detail from Core Dental

The following points are drawn from Core Dental's own published material on this topic. They are included here for completeness, and anything that applies to your own treatment should be confirmed with your clinician.

Ever since the 1977 introduction of fluoride to Melbourne's water supply, fluoride has been a hot topic among Melburnians. There are varying opinions on the matter, but we believe it is important to focus on

the available evidence and maintain a clear understanding of the proven role of fluoride in dental health. Many arguments against fluoride focus on water fluoridation as "mass medication" of a population or on the problematical ingestion of a "chemical". High-fluoride pastes should be used only by adults and carefully stored.

The published toothpaste rules, age by age

Choosing a children's toothpaste is one of the few dental questions with a published, specific answer. The Victorian Department of Health's guidance, in its own words:

"Brushing teeth without toothpaste until the age of 18 months"

"Introducing a low-fluoride toothpaste when a child is approximately 18 months old. Choose a low-fluoride toothpaste designed especially for children"

"Using a child-size toothbrush with soft bristles"

"Using only a pea-size amount of toothpaste, smeared over the toothbrush"

"Encouraging children to spit out toothpaste, not swallow it. Don't rinse"

"Supervising children when they brush their teeth until you are sure they can do it well"

"Continuing to use low fluoride toothpaste for children until they are six years old"

"Don't use fluoride supplements in the form of drops or tablets to be chewed or swallowed. They can affect the development of your child's adult teeth."

Four of those are commonly got wrong, and each has a reason behind it.

No toothpaste before 18 months. Brush from the first tooth, but with water. A toddler cannot reliably spit, and the whole point of the dose guidance is limiting how much a young child swallows.

A pea-size amount, "smeared over the toothbrush". Not a strip along the brush. The smearing matters as much as the quantity — it spreads a small amount rather than concentrating it.

Spit, don't rinse. Rinsing washes away the fluoride the brushing just applied, which defeats the purpose. This instruction appears in the Department's children's advice and again in its general guidance.

Don't use drops or tablets. This is the strongest prohibition on the list, and the reason is explicit: fluoride supplements "can affect the development of your child's adult teeth". If you have been given these, or bought them, raise it with us before continuing.

One qualification the Department adds, which applies to anyone outside a fluoridated supply: "if your drinking water is not fluoridated, seek professional dental advice about the use of fluoride toothpaste for children. A dental professional may advise more frequent use of fluoride toothpaste, commencement of toothpaste at a younger age or earlier commencement of use of standard toothpaste." In other words the standard schedule assumes fluoridated water; if yours is tank or bore water, the advice for your children may legitimately differ, and that is a conversation to have rather than a rule to read off a page.

A note on the source: this Department of Health page states its own review date as 30 April 2012. We quote it because the dose guidance it gives is specific and has not been superseded by anything we have read; where a figure matters to your own child, ask us at the appointment.

Source: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Dental care — fluoride, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (page reviewed 30 April 2012; accessed 4 November 2026).

Why the amount matters: the condition the dose rules exist to prevent

The toothpaste rules above are not arbitrary caution. They exist because of one specific, childhood-only outcome, and understanding it makes the rules easier to follow.

The Department of Health: "too much fluoride at an early age can cause a child's adult teeth (which form underneath their baby teeth) to stain. This is called dental fluorosis."

It then describes it in a way that should settle most parental worry: fluorosis "looks like fine, pearly-white mottling, flecking or lines on the surface of the teeth; it is usually very hard to see. It cannot develop after teeth are fully formed and does not affect the function of the teeth."

So the risk is real but narrow — it applies while the adult teeth are still forming under the gum, it is usually barely visible, and it does not weaken the tooth. And the mitigation is exactly the guidance above: "by following the toothpaste guidelines above, the chance of dental fluorosis occurring can be minimised."

Two further points worth having.

Fluorosis is not a water problem specifically. The Department notes it "can occur in areas with or without water fluoridation", which points at the variable that actually matters — how much toothpaste a small child swallows. That is why the pea-size and spit-don't-swallow instructions carry the weight they do.

Not every mark is fluorosis. "If fluoride is not the cause of staining of the teeth, it is not called dental fluorosis." The Department lists other causes of mottling: "injury to the teeth", "certain medications" and "childhood infections". If you have noticed white or mottled patches on your child's teeth, the right response is an examination, not stopping the toothpaste.

For adults, none of this applies to you: fluorosis "cannot develop after teeth are fully formed". Use a standard fluoride toothpaste, and if you are prone to decay, ask us whether a higher concentration is appropriate for your own circumstances — that is a clinical judgement, and we will not publish a figure for it.

Source: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Dental care — fluoride, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (page reviewed 30 April 2012; accessed 4 November 2026).

Frequently asked questions

Is fluoride toothpaste safe to use every day?

Fluoride toothpaste is designed for daily use when used as directed on the packaging, with a small amount and spitting out after brushing. Young children should be supervised so they do not swallow it. Ask your dentist if you have any questions about your own situation.

Will fluoride toothpaste whiten my teeth?

No. Fluoride protects the tooth surface from decay and acid erosion, but it is not a whitening treatment. If you are interested in changing the shade of your teeth, ask us about our whitening options and whether they suit you.

Can fluoride toothpaste replace visits to the dentist?

No. Fluoride toothpaste supports good home care, but it does not replace an examination. Your dentist checks for early decay, gum disease and other problems you may not notice yourself, and advises how often you should return.

Is a stronger toothpaste always better for my teeth?

Not necessarily. The right concentration depends on your age, your risk of decay and any sensitivity. Most everyday toothpastes sit within the usual range, and your dentist will tell you if a different product is advisable for you.

At what age should a child start using toothpaste?

Around 18 months. The Victorian Department of Health advises "brushing teeth without toothpaste until the age of 18 months", then "introducing a low-fluoride toothpaste when a child is approximately 18 months old", chosen as one "designed especially for children". Brush from the first tooth — with water before 18 months.

How much toothpaste should a child use?

"Only a pea-size amount of toothpaste, smeared over the toothbrush", in the Department's words, on "a child-size toothbrush with soft bristles". Smeared rather than squeezed along the brush — spreading a small amount is part of the instruction.

How long should children use children's toothpaste?

Until six. The Department advises "continuing to use low fluoride toothpaste for children until they are six years old", and supervising brushing "until you are sure they can do it well".

Are fluoride drops or tablets a good idea?

No. This is the Department's firmest instruction on the subject: "don't use fluoride supplements in the form of drops or tablets to be chewed or swallowed. They can affect the development of your child's adult teeth." If you have been given or bought these, raise it with us before continuing.

What if our water is not fluoridated?

Then the standard schedule may not apply to your children. The Department advises that if your drinking water is not fluoridated you should "seek professional dental advice about the use of fluoride toothpaste for children", and notes a dental professional "may advise more frequent use of fluoride toothpaste, commencement of toothpaste at a younger age or earlier commencement of use of standard toothpaste". If you are on tank or bore water, tell us when you book.

Related services and further reading

General dentistry

Children's dentistry

What is fluoride and what is it used for?

How do I know which toothpaste to use?

Can tooth decay be reversed?

What are fissure sealants and why should I get them?

The effects of acidic drinks on tooth enamel

4 things to avoid if you have sensitive teeth

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, with Monday to Friday hours to 6.00pm and Saturday mornings.

We quote before treatment starts and offer interest-free payment plans.

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 mornings, Sunday closed

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.

Why do dentists recommend fluoride toothpaste?

Dentists recommend fluoride toothpaste because fluoride strengthens enamel and helps protect teeth from decay and acid erosion. At Core Dental we suggest it as part of daily home care, alongside regular check-ups and cleaning between your teeth.

What does fluoride do to enamel?

Enamel takes up fluoride from toothpaste and saliva, which makes it more resistant to acid attacks from bacteria and from acidic foods and drinks. Our Core Dental team can explain how this fits with your own risk of decay.

How much fluoride is in most toothpaste?

Most fluoride toothpastes sold in Australia contain between 1000 and 1450 parts per million of fluoride, shown on the packaging. Core Dental dentists can advise which concentration is suitable for you, and the amount suited to your child.

Does fluoride reduce tooth sensitivity?

Fluoride used as a topical agent can decrease tooth sensitivity for some people. Core Dental dentists will first examine your teeth, because sensitivity can also come from decay, cracks or gum recession that need different treatment.

Can fluoride stop bacteria making acid?

Fluoride reduces the ability of mouth bacteria to produce the acids that cause decay. It works alongside brushing, cleaning between teeth and professional care, and our Core Dental team can guide your routine.

Who can advise on my child's toothpaste at Core Dental?

Our Core Dental dentists and hygienists can advise on the toothpaste type and amount suited to your child's age and decay risk. Call 13 13 16 or book online at your nearest Core Dental clinic.

How do I book a check-up at Core Dental?

Call Core Dental on 13 13 16 or book online through coredental.com.au. We have nine clinics across Melbourne and are open Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm and Saturday mornings, with Sunday closed.

Does Core Dental offer payment plans for dental care?

Yes. We quote before treatment starts and offer interest-free payment plans so you can spread the cost of treatment over time. Ask our team at your Core Dental clinic about eligibility and terms.