

## Going To The Dentist

### Finding a dentist

If you know other parents or carers of children with autism ask them about their dental experiences. Your own dentist may be able to care for your child or might refer you to a paediatric dentist.

### Talk to your dentist

Some useful questions to ask include:

- Do they have experience with children who have an autism spectrum disorder (ASD)?
- Do they have special procedures in order to accommodate your child's needs?
- Can you accompany your child in the room during the dental exam?
- Can you schedule your appointment at a time of day when the child is at their best?
- Can you bring the child for a desensitising appointment?

### What to tell your dentist

- Child's medication
- Language ability
- Sensory issues and behavioural needs

Whatever your child's unique needs are, you should discuss them with your dentist.

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## Book a desensitisation appointment

A desensitisation appointment will help your child become familiar with the dental clinic. Depending on your child's needs this might take a number of appointments that may include meeting the dental team and familiarising your child with the dental surgery and equipment.

## Before going to the dentist

Your child may benefit from visual supports. You can print out pictures of the steps to be carried out at a dental visit such as sitting in the dental chair and opening their mouth wide, this way your child is familiar with what will happen at their dental visit.

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# Autism

## Caring for Your Child's Dental Health



## What is Autism?

Autism is a group of developmental brain disorders, collectively called autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The term “spectrum” refers to the wide range of symptoms, skills, and levels of impairment, or disability, that children with ASD can have.

## Who is this leaflet for?

This leaflet is for parents and caregivers of children who have been diagnosed with autism. It provides information on tooth brushing technique, your child’s overall dental health and helpful tips on bringing your child to the dentist.

## How does Autism affect teeth?

Children with autism can face additional challenges in maintaining good dental health. Although autism does not cause oral health issues, children with autism often have poor oral hygiene and bad oral habits which can lead to problems. To assist you in caring for your child here is what to watch out for and some helpful tips.

### Tooth decay

Tooth decay is destruction of the enamel the hard white outer layer of the tooth. This is caused by a build-up of bacteria called plaque on the teeth. To prevent decay sugary snacks must be kept to a minimum. Tooth brushing twice daily with a fluoridated toothpaste and flossing will reduce the risk of decay.

### Gum disease

Bleeding gums is the first sign of gum disease and is caused by a build-up of plaque at the gum line. If you notice red, puffy gums or bleeding while brushing, make sure to continue brushing and flossing your child’s teeth twice a day and book a visit with your dentist or dental hygienist.

### Dry mouth

Some medications given to children with autism may cause dry mouth, which can lead to tooth decay. Ensure your child drinks plenty of water and inform your dentist of any medication that your child is taking. Your dentist or dental hygienist may recommend products to help.

### Teeth Grinding and Orthodontic Issues

Some children with autism clench or grind their teeth. This can lead to cracked teeth or pain in the jaw joint. Your dentist may make your child a mouthguard. Thumb sucking or pressing the tongue up against or between the teeth while swallowing may cause teeth to become misaligned and braces may be needed.

### Broken/lost teeth

Teeth may be broken or knocked out from biting hard objects, falls or seizures. This can be painful and must be treated immediately. If a tooth is knocked out, place the tooth in a clean container and cover with milk and bring your child to their dentist immediately.

## Tooth brushing

### Selecting a toothbrush

You may want to involve your child in selecting their toothbrush as some children may be drawn to certain colours or textures. You as a parent may find it easier to use a electric toothbrush or

a specially designed three sided toothbrush. Ideally a small headed toothbrush with soft bristles is best.

### Preparing your child for tooth brushing

You may want to prepare your child for tooth brushing by giving the child the toothbrush to familiarise them with the feel of the brush. Sometimes tooth brushing your own teeth in front of your child can help. Teaching your child to “open wide” will help when you are tooth brushing their teeth. Always make sure your child understands that you are going to brush their teeth before starting.

- Stand behind your child with their head on your chest.
- Put a pea-size amount of fluoridated toothpaste on the centre of the brush.
- Guide the brush as if you were brushing your own teeth.
- Angle the toothbrush at a 45 degree angle to the gums.
- Gently move the brush back and forth in short (tooth-wide) strokes.
- Brush the outer surfaces, the inner surfaces, and the chewing surfaces of the teeth.
- A timer for the two minutes may also help as your child can see when the task will end.

Although most people brush their teeth in the bathroom, this does not have to be the case with your child, tooth brushing can be carried out anywhere that your child feels most comfortable. The ultimate goal is for your child to brush their teeth as independently as possible.