

Fluoride



What is Fluoride?

Fluoride is a natural mineral that is very effective in protecting teeth against decay.

How does Fluoride work?

Tooth decay begins with dental plaque, a soft, sticky substance that builds up on your teeth. Plaque is mostly made up of bacteria, which feed on sugar from food and drink, producing acids as a waste product. The acids attack the teeth by dissolving the minerals in the tooth structure. If this happens too often, tooth decay results.

Minerals in saliva can mend the teeth. If fluoride is present in the mouth, it helps teeth to repair themselves.

And if fluoride is consumed in appropriate amounts by young children, it helps to make growing teeth more resistant to decay.

Fluoride in water supplies

In a few places, water supplies contain enough fluoride (one part per million) to keep teeth healthy. This can happen naturally, or the amount of fluoride can be changed to make it right for teeth. In Britain, only one person in ten gets enough fluoride from the water supply.



Fluoride in toothpaste

Most people get fluoride from toothpaste. Packs tell you how many parts per million (ppm) of fluoride the toothpaste contains. It might have a low fluoride level (less than 600 ppm), a standard concentration (about 1000 ppm) or a higher dose (about 1500 ppm).

The amount of fluoride you get in water or toothpaste is completely safe. If there is fluoride in your local water supply, you can still use fluoride toothpaste as well.

Up to the age of seven, while the permanent teeth are forming, consuming too much fluoride can produce unattractive marks on the teeth. To make sure this doesn't happen, you should help children up to age seven clean their teeth to make sure they do not eat the toothpaste and only use a small amount of toothpaste (an amount the size of a small pea is recommended).

Low-fluoride toothpastes are available for children; they should only be used by children who are at low risk of decay, drink fluoridated water, or are taking fluoride as tablets or drops. All children over six years of age should use toothpastes containing 1000 to 1500 ppm.

For patients who already have a lot of decay, dentists may recommend extra fluoride, either as tablets or drops, or as a varnish painted onto the teeth.