



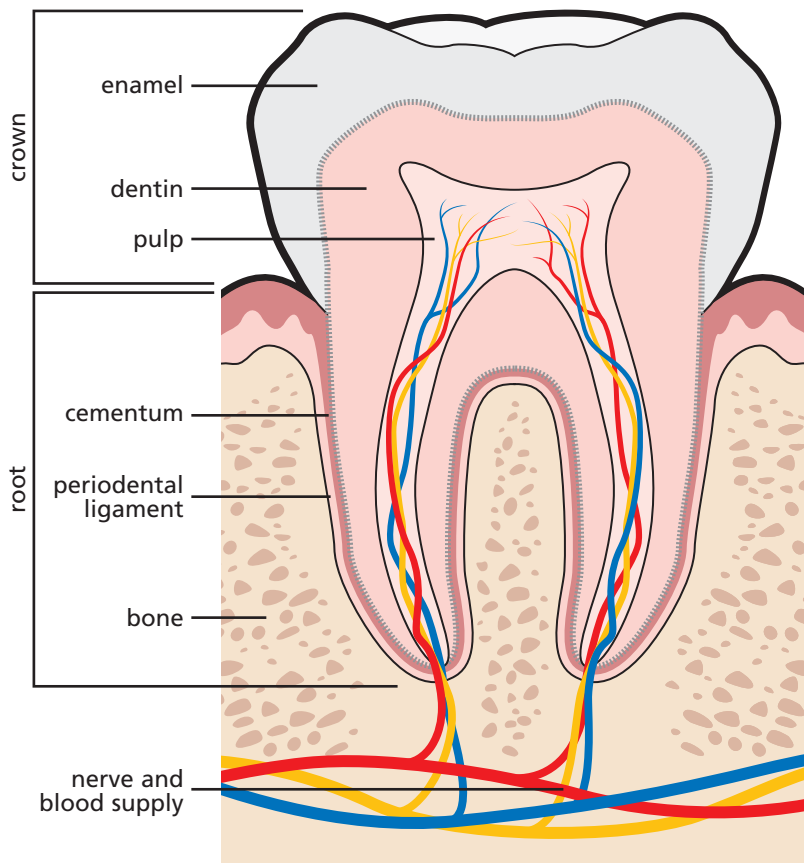
Tooth plaque

This information sheet from Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) explains about tooth plaque. Plaque is a soft sticky deposit that continually forms on each of the tooth surfaces. It contains many types of bacteria (germs). It affects everybody, regardless of age.

How dangerous is tooth plaque?

Brushing teeth daily is the best way to clean away tooth plaque. If plaque is not removed it can lead to more painful and serious dental conditions:

- **Tooth decay** – when plaque mixes with the sugar in the mouth (from food and drink), it creates acid. The acid causes decay or 'holes' in the teeth. Decay can be removed from the tooth, and treated with a filling if it is detected in time by the dentist. However, if left untreated, the decay can progress to the pulp (nerve) in the centre of the tooth, and cause toothache and an abscess. The tooth would then require an extraction (or root canal treatment for adult teeth).
- **Calculus (tartar)** – plaque will harden and calcify to produce calculus if it is given enough time (several days). Calculus is a hard cement-like substance, which cannot be removed with a toothbrush. The dentist or hygienist will remove this extra layer from the teeth.
- **Gingivitis** – when plaque sits at the gum line, it causes gingivitis. This is an inflammation of the gums, which makes them red and swollen. This can lead to pain. Gingivitis is reversible, and can be treated if the plaque is removed.





How is tooth plaque diagnosed?

Often, plaque cannot be seen.

Disclosing tablets can be helpful. These contain a coloured 'indicator'dye, which sticks to plaque. These are best used after brushing the teeth, to check the effectiveness. They can be bought from a pharmacy.

After brushing the teeth, chew on a disclosing tablet. Place Vaseline on the lips to avoid them being stained as well. Rinse with water. The colour remaining on the teeth is the plaque. This should be removed with further brushing.

How is tooth plaque treated?

Brush teeth twice a day. Begin brushing the teeth as soon as a child's first baby tooth appears. Supervise a child when brushing their teeth until they are around six years old.

Encourage a systematic approach to brushing, starting at one side, and working around to the other.

A variety of toothbrush types are available for different age groups and patient needs (cleft palate, limited mouth opening, and reduced manual dexterity). Ask a dentist for advice.

Children should visit the dentist every six months. The dentist can give the child more tips and demonstrate how to brush their teeth. They will also be able to detect decay.

Further information

Talk to the child's doctor or health visitor.

You can learn more about our clinical specialties by visiting dental and maxillofacial.

Contact the Oral Health Foundation – an independent charity working to improve standards of oral care. Call their helpline on 01788 539 780 or visit their website at www.dentalhealth.org