

# COVID-19 & YOUR TEETH



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Our teeth may be the last things on our minds at the moment. However dentists are limited in the treatment they can safely provide right now, so it is more important than ever that we look after our mouth correctly to help stop problems occurring.

## GENERAL DENTAL ADVICE

- Brush teeth twice daily with fluoride toothpaste once last thing at night and one other time of day
- After brushing, spit out toothpaste but do not rinse the mouth out
- Parents or carers should supervise tooth brushing until their child is at least 7 years old
- Reduce how much and how often sugary or acidic food and drinks are consumed
- Do not smoke and only drink alcohol within recommended limits
- Encourage children over 1 year old to stop feeding at night, using dummies and drinking from bottles

## DURING SOCIAL DISTANCING

1. A lack of a normal routine can make it easy to forget to brush your teeth regularly. Why not set reminders on your phone or download the [Brush DJ](#) app which can do this for you.
2. If you haven't flossed before and have some extra time on your hands why not start practicing? You should floss once a day before you brush your teeth - this [video](#) shows you the right technique. If your gums bleed when you are brushing or flossing this is a sign they need to be brushed more often, not less!
3. It is very easy to start snacking more if you are at home all day. If you want to eat in between your meals try to [choose healthier](#) snacks such as carrot, cucumber or celery sticks; cubes of cheese; breadsticks and hummus; plain yoghurt; rice crackers; or sugar-free boiled sweets. Keep any sweets or treats (including dried fruits and fruit juices) to mealtimes only!

## WHAT IF I GET PROBLEMS?

There are lots of things you can do to help manage dental problems at home and a few different ways you can do this are outlined below. However, if you have [severe pain](#) that can't be managed with painkillers; significant [swelling](#) in your mouth or on your face; [bleeding](#) that won't stop; or have had [trauma](#) to your teeth you may wish to seek further help.

Local dentists should be offering a telephone service to give you dental advice, support with using the right painkillers, and antibiotic prescriptions if these are needed. If they feel you need to be seen in person, they should direct you to an urgent care centre in your area. If you cannot speak to a dentist directly you should use the [NHS 111 service](#).

If you have any of the following you should call 999 or go straight to A&E:

- Swelling which is making it hard to swallow, breathe or open your eyes
- Trauma where you 'blacked-out' (lost consciousness), had double vision or were sick afterwards
- Severe uncontrollable bleeding

## TOOTHACHE AND SWELLING

If you have a sensitive tooth, first make sure that all surfaces of the tooth are cleaned using a toothbrush, floss, and fluoride toothpaste. Using a [desensitising toothpaste](#) such as Sensodyne or Colgate Pro-relief can also help. Ensure you do not rinse off the toothpaste after brushing. You can reapply this during the day using a clean finger and massaging a small amount of the toothpaste onto the sensitive area.

If you have an obvious hole in your tooth which is causing you sensitivity, again make sure that it is kept very clean with brushing and avoid any sugary or acidic foods which may make the hole worse. Using a rotating electric toothbrush with a small round head can help with cleaning tricky areas like this. Once clean, consider using a [temporary filling material](#) to pack into the space. These are generally available from supermarkets or pharmacies, as well as online.

Sleeping with an extra pillow can help with pain at night by elevating the tooth. Do not use heat over a painful tooth as this can make any infection present worse. Clove oil and aspirin should also not be placed on gums as they can cause severe burns. Salty mouthwashes\* and good cleaning can be used instead to calm swollen and sore gums, including abscesses which have 'popped' or are draining.

## PAINKILLERS

If your pain continues, consider taking some painkillers. Using a combination of [paracetamol and ibuprofen](#) is usually the best way to manage toothache. However, do read the instructions carefully to ensure you do not go over daily limits, and in particular make sure it is safe for you to take ibuprofen.

Ibuprofen is generally not recommended for people who are pregnant, have high blood pressure, or if you already take aspirin medication, for example. There is currently no strong evidence to suggest that taking ibuprofen is unsafe if you have Covid-19; however if you are able to manage your pain with just paracetamol this may be advisable as a precaution. For severe toothache not helped by painkillers and lasting more than a few days, seek advice.

## MOUTH ULCERS

If your ulcer has been caused by a rubbing denture, remove the denture. Once the ulcer has healed, a denture adhesive may help to secure a loose denture. If this does not help and the ulcer keeps recurring leave your denture out and contact a dentist for advice. If you feel a fractured tooth might be the cause, see if you can place a temporary filling material over the sharp edge to stop it catching.

Eat a [soft, bland diet](#) and use [salty mouthwashes](#)\* after every meal while the ulcer heals. You can also use a gel, spray or mouthwash containing benzydamine to help reduce any pain and discomfort from the ulcer. [If the ulcer does not heal after two weeks contact a dentist or 111](#) as there is a small chance that it could be a sign of something more serious.

**\*SALTY MOUTHWASHES:** use a mug of warm (cooled from boiling) water and mix half a teaspoon of salt in. Rinse this around the affected area for around 30 seconds and then spit out. You can do this a few times day; after meals is generally a good idea.

### WISDOM TOOTH PAIN

Pain from wisdom teeth often happens when the tooth hasn't come all the way through into the mouth. Food and debris can get stuck under the 'flap' of gum covering part of the tooth, which causes the gums to become sore and swollen. This is more likely to happen if you smoke or are pregnant.

Although it may be sore to do, the best way to manage this is to use a toothbrush with a small head to clean the area thoroughly. You should also carry out [salty mouthwashes](#)\* after every meal. Eating softer foods and [stopping smoking](#) can also help. Take painkillers as required until your symptoms go down. If you develop severe swelling which stops you opening your mouth, contact a dentist or 111.

### KNOCKED A TOOTH OUT

1. Manage any more serious injuries such as a head injury or significant bleeding.
2. [Check if the tooth is an adult or baby tooth](#). If it is a baby tooth or you are not sure, do not try to put it back in. If it's an adult (permanent) tooth:
  - Hold it by the white bit that sticks out of the gum (the crown). Do not touch the root.
  - Lick it clean if it's dirty, or quickly rinse it in cold running water for no more than 10 seconds.
  - [Try to put it back](#) into the hole in the gum. If it does not go in easily, put it in [milk or saliva](#) (spit into a container or hold it in your cheek - not for children as there is a risk they will swallow the tooth). If it goes back in, bite down gently on a clean cloth to hold the tooth in place.
3. Contact a dentist or 111 for further advice. You should do this even if you could not find the tooth.

### CHIPPED TOOTH, LOST FILLING/ CROWN OR BROKEN DENTURE

You can generally buy a [temporary filling material](#) or [denture repair kit](#) from supermarkets, pharmacies or online. Be sure to read the instructions on the products carefully as these can vary from brand to brand.

For chipped teeth and lost fillings: clean the area with a brush, dry it using some cotton wool or buds and then shape the material directly on the tooth.

If you have broken more than just a chip of your tooth, particularly if you can see a red spot in the middle of the tooth, contact a dentist or 111 for advice. If the tooth has been moved out of place, you can gently attempt to move the tooth back into its normal position but do not force this. You should then call for advice even if the tooth is back in its place. [After any trauma to your teeth you should have a soft diet and use salty mouthwashes\\* for 2 weeks.](#)

For lost crowns: first check the crown fits onto the tooth and into your normal bite before using any filling material. Stay seated upright or lean forward while doing this to help stop accidentally swallowing the crown. Make sure the tooth and the crown are clean. Place the material into the crown (about half full) and squeeze the crown onto the tooth. Place a piece of cotton wool roll or gauze over the crown and bite down to help seat it. Any [excess material should be removed](#) carefully with cotton buds and floss before it fully sets.

### BLEEDING AFTER AN EXTRACTION

Some red in your spit and slow oozing is normal after a tooth extraction. If the socket is bleeding freely, place [gauze or a clean handkerchief](#) over the socket and [bite down hard for 20 minutes](#). Do not take the gauze in and out during this time to keep checking, just bite down continuously. If the bleeding still doesn't stop after two rounds of 20 minutes, contact a dentist or 111.

[Avoid rinsing, spitting, hot drinks, chewy foods, smoking, alcohol or strenuous exercise](#) for 24 hours after any heavy bleeding has stopped. After 24 hours, use salty mouthwashes\* after every meal for a week.