

Fluoride and teeth

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Water fluoridation

Water fluoridation is a safe and very cost-effective way of reducing tooth decay. The association between the presence of fluoride in public water supplies and reduced tooth decay has been demonstrated by over 130 surveys in more than 20 countries including the UK. Since artificial water fluoridation was first introduced fifty years ago in the USA, millions of people all over the world have benefited. Adding fluoride to the water supplies can mean considerably less tooth decay for people living in the area: 60% of the population of the USA drink fluoridated water, compared with only 10% in the UK.

Twenty health professional bodies in this country including the BDA, the British Medical Association, the British Fluoridation Society, the Health Education Authority and the NHS Confederation have all recently re-affirmed their support for fluoridation by launching a campaign to extend water fluoridation.

Fluoride toothpaste

Fluoride toothpaste, which came into general use in the UK in the early 1970s, is now recognised as a development of the greatest importance to dental health and is one of the main reasons for the decline in tooth decay. National surveys of child dental health have shown a 75% reduction in tooth decay experienced by 12 year olds between 1973 and 1993. Brushing should be done twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste. Children should have their toothbrushing supervised up to 7 years old, using just a small pea sized amount of fluoride toothpaste and should be encouraged to spit out afterwards. The alternative to using fluoride toothpaste can be painful tooth decay and extractions.

Dental advice should be taken before using fluoride supplements.