



# Fluoride

a guide for parents and clients

## What is fluoride?

- > Fluoride is a mineral found naturally in sea water, some soil and air.
- > Fluoride helps to strengthen teeth.
- > Fluoride plays an important role in preventing tooth decay.

## Fluoride and oral health

- > Tooth decay happens when the bacteria in your mouth uses sugars and starches in food to produce acid.
- > The acid can cause minerals to be lost from the surface of your teeth. This is called demineralisation.
- > If demineralisation happens over time, a cavity is formed.
- > Fluoride helps repair the damaged tooth surface by remineralising and protecting your teeth from future acid attacks.

## Water fluoridation

- > In most areas of South Australia, fluoride is added to tap water to help protect teeth against decay.
- > The amount of fluoride added is small and closely regulated.
- > It is not harmful to your health or the environment.
- > Water fluoridation is well recognised as a safe and effective way to protect your teeth.

# Fluoride toothpaste

- > Brushing with fluoride toothpaste in the morning and before bed at night helps to prevent tooth decay.
- > After brushing, spit the toothpaste out but don't rinse.
- > Swallowing large amounts of toothpaste when adult teeth are growing (birth to eight years) may cause white flecks to show on the new teeth. To avoid this:
  - > children under 18 months should use a small, soft toothbrush with no toothpaste
  - > children 18 months to five years should use a pea size amount of low fluoride children's toothpaste
  - > children six years and over should use a pea size amount of fluoride toothpaste.

## Other sources of fluoride

- > Your dental professional may apply a fluoride gel or foam if you or your child are at risk of tooth decay. This treatment is generally not used under 10 years of age.
- > Fluoride varnish can be applied by your dental professional to protect tooth surfaces. This may be used for adults and children of all ages.
- > Fluoride mouthwash may be recommended for use at home. Your dental professional will advise you when and how to use it.
- > SA Dental Service does not advise using fluoride tablets or supplements. If your tap water is not fluoridated, or if you usually drink rainwater, bottled water or filtered water, contact your dental clinic for more advice.

If you have any questions about this information, please talk to our dental staff.

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## For more information contact:

**SA Dental Service**  
**GPO Box 864**  
**Adelaide SA 5001**  
**Telephone: 1300 008 222**

**[www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/sadental](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/sadental)**

Interpreters: If you need an interpreter, call the clinic before your appointment, so that staff can arrange for one to be present when you attend.

If you are deaf, or have a hearing or speech impairment, contact the National Relay Service. For more information call 1800 555 660 or visit [www.relayservice.gov.au](http://www.relayservice.gov.au)



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