

# Fluoride

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Fluoride is a natural element that can be found in the water we drink and the food we eat.

If you live in an area that doesn't have fluoride in the water then it is important to ensure you use fluoride toothpaste. Some people may also supplement their own water supply with fluoride drops or tablets, especially where only rainwater or tankwater is available. You should talk with your dentist about your fluoride options.

Always use toothpaste with a fluoride content that is appropriate (adult or child) and look for the Australian Dental Association "Seal of Approval" on the toothpaste tube. Additionally, the ADA Seal of Approval applies to some antiseptic mouthrinses of which some contain fluoride as well.

## Fluoride and Children

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Early last century, scientists began to notice that children, who lived in places where fluoride occurred naturally in the water, had fewer dental cavities. This led to research which determined the optimal level of fluoride in drinking water which would offer the best decay prevention. This is achieved by supplementing natural fluoride levels in tap water in many Australian cities and regional centres. Brisbane children continue to this day to miss out on this important benefit, consequently suffering almost double the decay rates of other Australian children who live in areas with fluoridated tap water.

Fluoride works in two ways - predominantly it 'soaks' into the tooth surface as you drink the water or use the toothpaste or mouth rinse and makes the tooth more resistant to acid attack.

This is the **TOPICAL** effect.

The presence of fluoride when teeth are first being formed can see it become part of the tooth.

This is called the **SYSTEMIC** effect.

At this stage, if the level of fluoride exceeds optimal levels, it may lead to dental fluorosis.

Many parents in areas that are not fluoridated (ring your local water board to find out) will ask whether they should give their children extra fluoride. Often the water supply is tank water. This prompts people to think whether they should give their children fluoride supplements (drops, tablets) or to fluoridate their own water supply. Because the need for this in individual cases relies on other decay risk factors, this decision is best made in consultation with your dentist.