

# Tooth Brushing

## Tips to Make Grooming Easier at Home



### General Tips for Success

- **Perform “heavy work” proprioceptive activities prior to non-preferred grooming tasks to aid in calming, regulation, and participation.**
  - Wall push-ups or pushes
  - Squeezes/big bear hugs
  - Wilbarger brushing protocol
  - Joint compressions
  - Animal walks (i.e., frog jump, bear walk)
  - Carrying a heavy object across the room
- **Positively reinforce compliance with grooming tasks (i.e., reward with preferred toy after participation in morning routine tasks or in nightly bathtime).**
  - Ensure that the child knows exactly what they are being rewarded for
  - Use “First, then” language (i.e., “First trim 1 nail, then toy”)
- **Utilize a visual/picture schedule during grooming routines to prepare the child for what is to come (e.g., “iDo Hygiene” app).**
- **Model the grooming task on yourself to increase the child’s comfort with the task.**
- **Play soft, calming music or sing in a slow, rhythmic tone for calming, (e.g., “Ants Go Marching”).**
- **Allow a video or preferred toy for distraction if the task is highly aversive.**

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### Prior

- Prior to tooth brushing, desensitize the face by firmly rubbing a warm washcloth over the cheeks, lips, sides of the nose, and chin
- Allow the child to utilize their finger to brush teeth before upgrading to a toothbrush
- Allow the child to pick his/her own toothbrush
- Also prior to tooth brushing, provide calming deep pressure to the arms and legs, progressing towards the face

### During

- **Try using a brush with extremely soft or silicone bristles**
  - “Baby Banana Infant Teething Toothbrush” at Target.com
- **Or, utilize a non-flavored, non-foaming toothpaste such as Oranurse**
- **Try an electric Spinbrush, as the vibration provided can be calming and regulating**
- **Take turns brushing each other’s teeth**
  - Increased exposure to the concept and allows the child some control over the task
- **Brush in front of the mirror such that the child is able to see what is happening**
- **Make tooth brushing a game - attack on the cavities!**
- **Incorporate a visual timer**
  - Start with just a few seconds and work your way up to 2 minutes
  - Can also aid in encouraging children who seek oral sensory input to brush for an appropriate period of time, rather than too long
- **Count to a specific number each time the child brushes. When the number is reached, brushing stops**
  - This can be incrementally increased to facilitate tooth brushing tolerance

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### In General

- Experiment with different flavors of toothpaste to determine which the child prefers
- Consider using no toothpaste initially to increase the child's comfort with the idea of having his/her teeth brushed
- Start small to prevent overwhelming the child if brushing is extremely difficult
  - Start with 1-2 teeth per day, then increase from there
- Trial different temperatures of water to see which is better tolerated orally
- Consider a toothbrush that sings or lights up
- Try brushing teeth while in the bathtub to combine these grooming tasks