



CASE STUDY

Working with our high risk patients (red patients)

Case history

Atticus, is now aged 5. Three years ago, two days short of his second birthday, Atticus went into hospital for a general anaesthetic in order to have six of his top front teeth extracted. The teeth were so decayed that they were actually crumbling away and extraction was the only viable option. Like many patients do, Atticus presented to us with very high needs. But our message to him and the others is consistent. "We can work brilliant together to make your teeth normal and ensure you never have any more teeth taken out."

Patient's Perspective

Do you remember going to hospital to have your teeth out?

Yes, I was really, really scared. I didn't understand what was going on, I was frightened of the hospital and all the equipment. Mum tried to explain what was going on, but I was terrified when they used a mask with the 'knockout gas' to send me to sleep.

Did you feel better when you woke up?

No. When I woke up after my teeth were taken out, it still hurt and I was still very upset

How did your missing teeth make you feel, once you got home?

The pain did go away after a while. But now I spoke with a lisp, because of the gaps in my mouth. I couldn't say my words properly.

Did this affect your day to day life?

Yes. I couldn't talk normally to my friends as I grew up and other children laughed at me and sometimes bullied me.

How did you feel when you had to go back to the dentist?

I don't like going to the dentist or the doctor or anyone like that. I'm always very anxious and a bit scared. I always think I'm going to get hurt again.

What happened when you went to see Dr Atkins?

That was different, he wasn't like the others. He talked to me and showed me a new toothbrush which has a game with it that I can play on my phone. He never hurt me.

Did you like the new toothbrush?

Yes! After all my teeth were taken out, I didn't want to use a toothbrush and Mum says that I didn't clean my teeth very well. Now I really like cleaning my teeth and looking at my phone to see how I'm doing. When I clean my teeth, I practise my counting as I move the brush around my teeth. If I go on a sleep over I always take my brush with me so that I don't miss a go.

So, do you like going to the dentist now?

Yes I do – I enjoy going to see Ben, it's fun!

Dr Atkins says, "Like many dentists, I have seen dreadful cases of tooth decay in children and over 40,000 children had teeth extracted by general anaesthetic, in hospital in 2016. Often children are not brought to the dentist until they are older; whereas even newly born children and their parents should visit as early as possible – certainly before teething commences.

The oral health of children is a joint responsibility between dental teams, government, patients and their carers. Dentists can play a vital role, providing preventive treatment, advice and support."

Technical Knowledge

With such poor oral health so early in life, it was absolutely essential to bring about behavioural change for Atticus and his parents to avoid a lifetime of further invasive treatment. Following the operation, Atticus was referred to Dr Ben Atkins, a dentist renowned for his belief that oral health can be transformed by radical behavioural change.

As he has told us, unsurprisingly, Atticus was a reluctant patient and associated medical environments with pain, discomfort and ongoing stress.

Ben Atkins is a keen advocate of preventative dentistry and studies of some of his high needs patients in his Greater Manchester practice are proof that improving oral hygiene is an effective first step in transforming oral health. Dr Atkins believes that regular teeth cleaning and most importantly, the correct brushing technique, can make a truly staggering difference, even in a high-needs patient such as Atticus. Looking to minimise dental treatment where possible, Dr Atkins has embraced technological innovation as the potential key to help strengthen the relationship between himself and his patients.

After his extractions, Atticus was understandably reluctant to brush his teeth. Ben decided that the best approach was to combine something new in oral healthcare with an engaging 'chair side' approach to try and quell the fears through curiosity and the gradual building of trust.

Notwithstanding Atticus' age, it was still important to engage both him and his mother in an initial conversation about diet. There are many misconceptions about so-called 'healthy foods'. The levels of harmful sugars in (for example) Smoothies and Dried, as opposed to fresh, fruit are considerable. We all recognise the harmful sugar levels in sweets and fizzy drinks. If we are not careful, the damage that is done to a child's first teeth can also impact on their adult teeth as they come through.

So, it's never too early to start a good oral hygiene regime with our children.

Part of the solution to allaying Atticus' fears and overcoming historical oral healthcare issues was to show Atticus the latest in electric toothbrush technology. This was another stimulus to encourage him to change his behaviour. He really bought into it as a fun way to make sure he cleans twice a day.

He has confidence in Ben Atkins and is now enthusiastic about his regular check-up visits.

Now five years old, Atticus' oral hygiene has dramatically improved and so has his self-confidence! Although he will continue to be monitored, he does not need any further dental work. Dr Atkins has also witnessed a massive behavioural change in the mother, as well as in the child. Now, oral hygiene and a low sugar diet are a priority for the whole family.

Facts and Figures (supplied by BDA)

- Tooth decay – a completely preventable disease - is the number 1 cause of hospital admissions among children in UK. It can have a significant impact on children's general health, development, school readiness, confidence, ability to sleep, eat and socialise.
- Tooth extractions under GAs in hospitals cost the NHS over £35 million/year.
- A recent NHS survey revealed that more than a fifth of 12-year-olds (22%) experienced difficulty eating as a result of poor dental health in the past three months, and more than a third (35%) reported being embarrassed to smile or laugh due to the condition of their teeth.
- In adulthood, poor oral health may increase the risk of serious diseases such as stroke, diabetes and heart attack, and can significantly impair people's ability to find a job.
- In Scotland and Wales, the ChildSmile and Smile4Life campaigns have been brought in to tackle tooth decay but there is currently no national programme in England.
- Polling by YouGov for the BDA shows that 1 in 4 parents are unaware that dental treatment for their children is free of charge.



Here's some good basic tips for parents:

1. Don't let them brush alone

Although it's important to have them brush themselves to get into the habit you should supervise your child's brushing until they are about seven years old. This means you can make sure they are doing it correctly and for the correct amount of time.

2. Don't get the wrong toothbrush

The wrong size brush may mean that a child cannot handle it properly and therefore is not able to clean all of the teeth properly. Also, if the bristles are too hard it can damage the gums. Children should be using a soft to medium small sized toothbrush. Having one with their favourite character can also help them to become actively involved in brushing their own teeth.

3. Spit don't rinse

Make sure children do not rinse their mouths out with water after brushing as it washed away the protective fluoride left behind by brushing.

4. Use the toothpaste with the correct amount of fluoride

It is advised that children use adult toothpaste, toothpaste with 1450 ppm (parts per million) of fluoride as it protects the teeth long after brushing. They can use the same toothpaste as you. Children's toothpaste can be confusing. The challenge is the 'super tasting' child. This means that their taste is really heightened, i.e. even minty adult toothpaste can taste really strong. This is what children's toothpaste is for (getting your children to want to brush their teeth and not being put off by the strong taste). There are many flavours and getting one they like can be helpful as long as it has the right level of fluoride.

5. Don't wet toothbrush before you use it

A little known one but wetting the toothbrush before using it softens the bristles and can make it less effective. Especially if you are already using a soft bristled toothbrush.

6. Don't brush within an hour of eating

After eating or drinking, especially sugary things, the enamel on teeth becomes softened. It takes about an hour for the mouth to return to normal so brushing within this time can brush away bits of enamel and lead to tooth erosion.

7. Make sure they visit the dentist regularly

Every child is different and therefore should visit the dentist as regularly as their dentist recommends. You should even take them along with you so they get used to the sights, sounds and smells of the dental practice so they are comfortable when they have to visit.

8. Don't let them disregard baby teeth

Baby teeth deserve care while they are there, far too many people have a perverse idea that as baby teeth fall out they don't have to care for them as much as they do adult teeth, this is a very wrong and dangerous way of thinking. If a child picks up poor oral health habits when they have baby teeth then they are much more likely to take into later life and cause permanent damage to their adult teeth.

9. Make sure you get the timings right

Habits are very important as setting a routine early means they are more likely to take them into later life. So, you should try to get them into a routine where they brush before bedtime (this should be part of the bedtime routine) and at one consistent time of day every day – say before breakfast.

10. The two-minute rule

Try to guess two minutes when we are brushing and we will get it wrong so imagine getting your toddler to do this. You can try get them to brush along to a song to ensure they are brushing for the right amount of time. Reward charts are a great way for them to challenge themselves too.

11. Keep fizzy/sugary drinks and snack to mealtimes

Snacking or sipping on sugary foods and drinks during the day means the teeth come under constant attack from acid and sugar. Keeping these to mealtimes gives their teeth time to recover.

12. Don't give sugary rewards

Pretty self-explanatory, stickers, TV time or even extra playtime are great rewards and won't lead to tooth decay.

Remember - The basics are easy.

- Brush your teeth twice a day with an adult toothpaste
- Make cleaning fun pick a favourite tune that lasts two minutes as your cleaning song!
- Don't rinse with water after brushing, this will cause the fluoride to be rinsed away
- Keep your sugar intake low and look out for the hidden sugars in things like dried fruit and smoothies
- Try fresh fruit, cheese and milk; rather than dried fruit, fizzy drinks and sugar based foods
- Keep anything sweet to meal times, reducing the frequency of sugar intake makes a massive difference