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# Tackling the Toothbrush

Children in general run from brushing teeth but for individuals with autism it can be even more difficult. Tastes and smells can become too much. This struggle can lead to tooth decay and even more pain and suffering at the dentist. A few tips and strategies for you to try out.

**The toothbrush:** Let them choose! Whether it is Thomas the Tank engine, Mushy Monsters or Harry Potter it is typically pretty easy to find a toothbrush with that favoured character. Sometimes that alone is enough to motivate those that are more reluctant to cleaning their teeth.

**Manual or Battery:** Some parents recommend using a vibrating toothbrush as it counteracts the oral sensitivity and provides the necessary stimulation.

**Sensitivity to the bristles:** Every individual is different so try a range of toothbrushes. Some will feel softer and more comfortable than others.

**Toothpaste:** Many of the adult minty flavours are too overpowering for those with autism that I have worked with. You have to try lots of different ones to find one that's more palatable.

**The routine:** Talk the child through it. Left, then right, over and over until it becomes routine. Count the strokes. When you give a definite amount to go for, there is a goal set. The child knows how much longer he must endure it, making it easier to go through with it. He also knows exactly when to switch sides, go up and down or back and forth.

**Control:** Let the child do most of the brushing. No matter how terribly it works out, it empowers the child and lets him or her feel capable. You can always go over it afterwards.

**Play brushing games:** You both brush at the same time, the child brushes you and then you brush back, number games, superhero games, the sky is the limit.

**Keep to a certain routine:** That might include going to the bathroom, washing hands with soap, rinsing it off, drying hands and then brushing teeth. If the child follows a certain routine every day and every night, it is easier on both parties to follow through.

**Having a star system:** Have a chart up in the bathroom and give a star sticker every time the child brushes his or her teeth. When it is filled up, you decide the best course of action.

