Fluoride

In recent decades there has been a significant reduction in the amount of tooth decay in the Western world. The number of fillings performed on both children and adults has reduced dramatically, as has the number of teeth lost as a consequence of tooth decay. A large part of this improvement in dental health has been attributed to the use of fluoride.

Not all areas in the UK contain fluoride in the drinking water. This is why fluoride may be added to specific dental products including toothpastes, mouth rinses, drops and tablets. It is even added to some brands of dental floss.

Fluoride is believed to work in three key ways:-

- It is incorporated into the structure of the teeth during development, making them more resistant to the decay process.
- It helps to reverse the decay process.
- It interferes with the ability of the germs (bacteria) in dental plaque, the sticky substance present on the tooth surface, to produce acid and cause decay. This is why it is important that the optimal amounts of fluoride should be available to both children and adults alike, preferably from early childhood in order to derive the greatest benefits.

Fluoride is used in dentistry both as an aid to prevent tooth decay (dental caries) and also to treat it. The normal recommendation or children under seven years of age is to brush with only a small smear of toothpaste applied to the toothbrush. This and carefully supervised brushing routine are needed since children are prone to miss areas and swallow the toothpaste, especially if they like the taste. There are special children’s toothpastes available that contain lower concentrations of fluoride.