

## Tips from the Tooth Fairy

Queensland is in the grips of "dental devastation", says the Tooth Fairy, aka Stephanie Wilson, and has Australia's worst decay rates after years without fluoridated water.

"Now that fluoride has been introduced into Brisbane water it's going to be better, but it's going to take at least five years before we see any results from that." Wilson (pictured below) says parents hold the key to their children's dental health and also to their psychological approach to visiting the family dentist.

"Parents are the ones that scare children going to the dentist," she says. "You always hear about mum and dad sitting at the dinner table saying, 'I'm not going to take them to the dentist because when I went they pulled out all these teeth, gave me a big needle', and this child is sitting there like a sponge, taking it all in."

Wilson says children should brush their teeth twice a day with fluoridated toothpaste and under parental supervision until they are eight.

She says a varied, healthy diet is essential, as are regular visits to the dentist, starting when the child is two.

"At two years, they should be going to the dentist every 12 months, and from four years, around every six months.

"The initial visits are really just to see that their teeth are growing in the right places, getting them relaxed in the chair and making sure there is no work to be done," Wilson says.

"Some children come at four and have rampant caries (cavities) and lots of decay because of bottles. A lot of parents don't know that by giving their children bottles in bed at night, they get bottle decay.

"So that's really important, to get them in at two years so we can educate the parents, get the child comfortable and relaxed, and make sure everything is maintained well at an early age."

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DARE TO BE DIFFERENT

# I SAID TO MUM, 'I'M GOING TO BE THE NICEST DENTIST ANYONE COULD HAVE AND THE KIDS ARE NOT GOING TO BE SCARED'

*The Tooth Fairy is real and lives in the Redlands where she is helping children overcome their fear of visiting the dentist, writes Leanne Edmiston*

It's not every day you get to chat with the Tooth Fairy.

She's a bubbly, happy little fairy who most often gets asked about her age (she's ageless), whether she can fly (yes, on the energy generated by children's love and cuddles), and her going rate for lost teeth.

"It's a coin because it's just a Tooth Fairy token, so it's a gold coin for a healthy tooth and a silver coin for an unhealthy tooth with sugar bugs."

But the Tooth Fairy's more concerned about the terrible state of Queensland children's teeth, as well as the number of children too terrified to sit in a dentist's chair.

That's why the Tooth Fairy started her own practice – TFI (Tooth Fairy International) Dentistry – to show children how important healthy teeth are and that a visit to the dentist is nothing to be afraid of.

Her alter ego, oral health therapist Stephanie Wilson, says she knows what it is like to be traumatised by a visit to the dentist.

"When I was 12 I had four teeth taken out by a cranky old typical traditional dentist. This dentist said we don't have mums come into the room, she had to wait outside. I was crying and scared," Wilson, now a mum of two, says.

"He injected every side of my mouth, he pulled out four teeth in one go and said, 'Hurry up, it's not going to hurt too much'."

"As a child, I heard the key words hurt, fast, pain. I came out and said to Mum, 'One

day I'm going to be the nicest dentist anyone could have and the kids are not going to be scared'."

Fast forward through an oral health therapy degree at the University of Queensland, four years working as a dental hygienist in Switzerland and another eight years in Redlands, to 2004 – and Wilson opens her children's dentistry practice at Thornlands.

Every Thursday and Saturday, she dresses as the Tooth Fairy and sees children encouraged to dress up as elves, fairies or superheroes in her fairy-themed surgery, complete with music, murals and candles.

They get a signed photo with the Tooth Fairy and a T-shirt on their first visit, and can also have their face painted.

"The whole concept of the tooth fairy was sort of sneered on by the dental board, as opposed to the white jacket.

"They assessed the practice and said everything's done brilliantly. I wear the mask, the glasses, the gloves but it's all pretty and pink and fairy-ish."

Wilson says she treats about 30 children each Tooth Fairy day, some of whom have come from Rockhampton, Toowoomba, northern NSW and even overseas.

"There's not many children I haven't been able to treat. Last week, one little boy stood out. He kicked and screamed at the last dentist, they couldn't get him into the chair.

"The other fellow said just get him



**Stephanie Wilson** treats Ava Matthews (top) as Hannah Wyatt and Ingrid Seibert watch; and it's all still smiles afterwards.

sedated, get all the work done. But mum Googled children's dentistry, came up with the Tooth Fairy and drove from Toowoomba.

"He dressed as a superhero. I went into the waiting room and said, 'We're going to the most beautiful place. It's Fairyland.'

"We got four fillings done, he was fantastic. Mum cried the whole way through."

Success stories like these led Wilson to open a second practice on the Gold Coast and write an Education Queensland accredited health education program performed at schools and childcare centres in Queensland and Victoria.

She also has a CD *She's the Tooth Fairy* and a children's book.

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