

Prevention of tooth decay is our priority.

Tooth decay happens when bacteria in your mouth consume the sugars in the food you eat.

When you eat food containing ordinary sugars, it gives bacteria on your teeth energy, allowing them to multiply and start making acids that can eat away the enamel on the teeth. This "acid attack" causes tooth decay and cavities to begin to form (decay).

Eating a healthy diet and maintaining good oral hygiene through brushing and flossing your teeth with fluoride toothpaste are the most effective ways to prevent tooth decay.

Diet

Try to avoid food and drink high in fermented carbohydrates. This includes:

- fizzy drinks
- coffee and tea with sugar added
- chocolate, sweets, cakes, biscuits
- crisps, white bread
- fruit juice, smoothies and squash

Healthier alternatives for snacks and drinks include:

- cheese
- fruit, nuts and vegetables
- unsweetened tea, coffee
- water and milk

You should not avoid carbohydrates altogether, as they are an important part of a balanced diet. But try and choose the type of carbohydrates known as unrefined carbohydrates, as bacteria find it harder to break these down into acid.

Good sources of unrefined carbohydrates include:

- wholemeal or brown bread
- pasta, rice (especially brown)
- potatoes
- leafy green vegetables
- eggs
- fresh fruit, nuts and seeds and vegetables
- cheese and savoury biscuits
- humous and pitta bread

Sugar and food labels

'No added sugar' doesn't mean 'no sugar'. Check labels on foods to see how much sugar they contain. Sugar comes in many forms, so look out for the following ingredients:

- glucose, sucrose, dextrose, maltose, fructose
- honey
- hydrolysed starch or syrup

Chewing gum

Chewing sugar-free gum after you have eaten may also help prevent tooth decay. When you chew gum, your mouth produces saliva, which neutralises the acid in your mouth before it can damage your teeth.

Xylitol

Xylitol is a natural sweetener derived from the fibrous parts of plants. It does not break down like sugar and can help keep a neutral pH level in the mouth. Xylitol also prevents bacteria from sticking to the teeth. This is how it protects the teeth from tooth decay. With Xylitol, the acid attack that would otherwise last for over half an hour is stopped. You can get Xylitol containing toothpaste, mouthwash, gum, mints, sweets and in a granular form to put in drinks and foods.

Visit www.xylitol.org for more information

Brushing

Brush your teeth at least twice a day with fluoride toothpaste. Ideally, brush at least 30 minutes after eating rather than before. Always brush your teeth before bed as when you sleep the beneficial saliva flow is reduced. Your dentist may prescribe a high fluoride containing toothpaste if you have tooth decay.

Brushing your tongue will help freshen your breath and will clean your mouth by removing bacteria.

Do not rinse with water or mouthwash after brushing as this washes the protective toothpaste away. Just spit out excess toothpaste.

Mouthwash

Using dental mouthwash that contains fluoride can also help prevent tooth decay and repair areas that have started to decay. However, this should not be used directly after tooth brushing. Choose a separate time to use mouthwash such as after lunch and tea. Do not eat or drink for 30 minutes after using a fluoride mouthwash.

Flossing

Flossing is an important part of oral hygiene. It removes plaque and food particles from between your teeth and under the gum line - areas a toothbrush cannot always reach. You should clean between your teeth at least once a day with floss.

Your dentist or hygienist can advise you on flossing techniques.

Visit your dentist regularly

Regular dental examinations will help with early detection of tooth decay and this in turn allows for more conservative methods of treatment including application of fluoride varnish and fissure sealants instead of fillings.

Importantly your dentist will be able to advise you and monitor your progress as well and assist in keeping your teeth for longer.

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