

Nutrition and oral health

You can fight tooth decay by: eating healthy foods, practicing good oral hygiene and frequently using toothpaste and mouth rinses that contain fluoride. When making nutritionally-balanced food choices, you not only benefit your general health, but your dental health, as well.

Nutrition and cavities (tooth decay)

How do food and beverages cause tooth decay?

The food you eat and beverages you drink come into contact with the bacteria that live in your mouth. These bacteria live in a sticky film called plaque that forms on teeth. The bacteria use the sugars and starches (found in many foods and beverages) to produce acids that can destroy the hard outer layer of tooth called enamel. These harmful acids can attack tooth enamel for 20 minutes or longer after eating. Repeated attacks can cause the enamel to break down, causing cavities. The more often you eat and the longer food stays in your mouth, the more damaging it is to your teeth.

Below are helpful tips to keep in mind when choosing meals and snacks.

- *Eat a variety of food*

The Food Guide Pyramid is a general guideline to help you make healthy food choices. When you eat more foods at the bottom of the pyramid, and limit foods at the top, you can be sure that you're getting the nutrients you need.

The Food Guide Pyramid

A guide to daily food choices



(continued)

Reduce your risk for cavities by choosing foods and beverages wisely.
A good variety of wholesome foods, eating less often, and brushing your teeth with a fluoride toothpaste can greatly reduce your risk of getting a cavity.

- *Limit between-meal snacks and drinks.*

While it's important to eat three meals a day, reducing how *often* you snack between meals helps reduce your risk for cavities. Try drinking fluoridated tap water or bottled sparkling water, such as H2Oh![®], and eat no more than three meals with three snacks a day to help prevent cavities. Choose nutritious foods for snacks such as raw vegetables, fruit, milk, cheese, nuts or wholegrain crackers.

- *Eat cavity-fighting foods.*

Cariostatic foods (such as cheese, nuts, popcorn or vegetables) help prevent cavities. These foods form a protective coating for tooth enamel and help to neutralize the acids formed by bacteria in the plaque.

- *Limit high-sugar foods, sticky and starchy foods.*

Sticky, sugary foods, such as raisins, dried fruit, Fruit Roll-ups[®], potato chips, and candy stay on your teeth longer and have more time to cause cavities. Foods, such as hard candy, cough drops, and breath mints stay in your mouth a long time. During this time, tooth enamel is attacked by acids. A good alternative is sugarless cough drops, sugarless mints and sugarless candy.

- *Drink beverages with every meal.*

Liquids leave your mouth quickly and help wash away sticky foods. The less time food stays in your mouth and sticks to your teeth, the lower your chance for developing cavities.

- *Limit soft drinks.*

Sipping soft drinks, sports drinks, lemonade or fruit juice over an extended period of time contribute to cavities more than when you drink them with a meal. Your teeth are exposed to sugar and acid production longer when you sip beverages alone all day. A better choice is fluoridated tap water, as it contains fluoride, but no acid.

Tips for good dental hygiene

- Brush your teeth thoroughly with a fluoride toothpaste in the morning and at bedtime. Brush after meals and snacks if possible.
- Floss your teeth daily to remove plaque from between your teeth.
- Chew sugarless gum (especially those containing xylitol sweetener) after meals and snacks when you can't brush.