



Nutrition and Your Oral Health

For your dental health.

Keeping your teeth and gums beautiful, healthy, and strong is about more than just brushing, flossing, and avoiding sweets. Good nutrition also plays a large role in your dental health. A balanced diet, characterized by moderation and variety, will help boost your body's immune system, so you'll be less vulnerable to oral disease. A healthy diet also provides the nutrients your body needs to maintain strong teeth and healthy gums.

Frequency



Starchy foods

Recent research has found that your dental health isn't just affected by what you eat. It's also affected by how often you eat. Every time you eat a starchy food, like crackers, bread, cookies, or candy, the bacteria in your mouth feast on it. In turn, they produce acids that attack your teeth for 20 minutes or more. And the more frequently you eat, the more your teeth are exposed to these acids, which can eventually dissolve your tooth enamel. Also, foods that stick to your teeth, like potato chips and dried fruit, as well as foods that are slow to dissolve in your mouth, like hard candies and granola bars, give acids more time to work on destroying your tooth enamel.

Specific foods

Another way your diet can affect your dental health is the way you combine your foods. Sticky or starchy foods create less acid in your mouth when they are eaten as part of a meal. Why? Because saliva production increases at mealtime, and saliva not only rinses away food particles, but it also neutralizes harmful acids and helps to remineralize your teeth, making them more resistant to acid attacks. Also, eating foods like nuts, cheese, onions, and certain teas has been shown to actually slow down the growth of decay-causing bacteria.



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Soda

One of the main offenders when it comes to tooth decay is soda, dubbed "liquid candy" by many nutritionists. The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition has identified soda as the number-one source of refined sugar in the American diet. In fact, a 12-ounce can of soda contains a quarter cup of sugar: about 12 teaspoons! And soda also contains phosphoric acid, which can erode the protective enamel layer of your teeth.



Soda – "Liquid Candy"

American teenagers have doubled, or even tripled, their consumption of soft drinks over the past decade. This is bad news for their teeth, because soft drinks literally bathe teeth in sugar and phosphoric acid for an extended period of time. And soda usually replaces a healthy, nutrient-rich alternative like milk.

Improving nutrition for oral health

To maximize your nutrition and your oral health:

- limit your intake of sweets and refined starches like crackers or white bread to once or twice a day;
- brush, rinse, or chew sugarless gum immediately after eating;
- eliminate soda from your diet or limit it to special occasions;
- make sure you get plenty of calcium and vitamins B, C and D, which help to keep your bones, teeth, and gums strong and healthy;
- avoid breath mints, gum, and cough drops that contain sugar;
- read food labels to check for hidden sugar;
- and remember that "natural" sugars are also harmful to your teeth.



A healthy diet