

# Want Some Life Saving Advice?

## Ask Your Dental Hygienist About Nutrition and Oral Health

Behind every healthy smile, there is a daily oral care routine that includes brushing, flossing, and rinsing—along with good nutrition. Your food choices and eating habits affect the health of your teeth and gums in distinct ways. Certain nutrients in foods are involved in developing and maintaining healthy teeth and gums, and make your gums more resistant to infection by enhancing your mouth's natural protective mechanisms. On the other hand, certain types of foods, as well as when and how much you eat, can promote the development of the plaque that causes tooth decay.

### Eating Right for a Healthy Mouth and Healthy Body

Different foods supply different nutrients and other healthful substances. Many of the foods that help your body build and maintain strong muscles and bones also help build strong, healthy teeth and gums.

- Dairy products provide calcium, vitamin D, and phosphorus to build and maintain strong teeth and bones. Good sources include low-fat milk, cheese, and yogurt. Aim for three servings of dairy per day.
- Whole grains supply B vitamins for growth, and iron for healthy blood, which in turn contributes to healthy gum tissue. Choose high-fiber breads, cereals, and rice.
- Many fruits and vegetables are good sources of vitamin C and folic acid (among other important nutrients such as antioxidants), which help protect against gum disease. Aim for five servings of fruits and vegetables per day.
- Lean meat, fish, poultry, and beans supply iron and protein for overall good health as well as magnesium and zinc for teeth and gums.

Eating a balanced variety of foods in moderation helps ensure that you're supplying your body with the right amounts

of nutrients. And an eating plan that includes enough essential nutrients, while limiting fat (especially saturated and trans fat), salt, alcohol, and sugars can reduce your risk for chronic diseases such as heart disease, certain types of cancer, diabetes, stroke, osteoporosis, and gum disease.

### Eating Right to Prevent Gum Disease

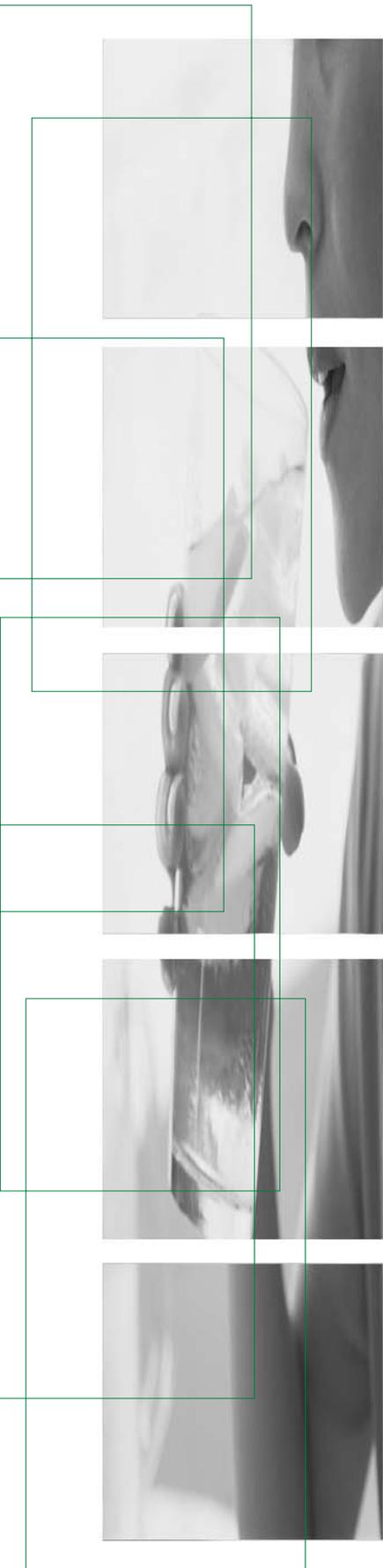
It is well known that what and when you eat affects the health of your teeth and your risk for tooth decay. But did you know that good nutrition also has a significant impact on your body's immune system, which in turn helps in maintaining healthy gums. Periodontal (gum) disease affects about 75% of American adults and is a primary cause of tooth loss. The bacteria that cause gum

## Fluoride: Enough, But Not Too Much

**Fluoride is an essential mineral for the developing teeth of young children. Once teeth erupt, fluoride helps prevent tooth decay by protecting teeth from the acids in plaque. Primary sources of fluoride include toothpaste, fluoride rinses, chewable fluoride supplements, or fluoridated water.**

**However, be aware that fluoride supplements should not be given to children under six months of age. For children over six months, fluoride supplements are only necessary if your water supply is deficient in fluoride.**

**Too much fluoride can cause dental fluorosis, a mottled and gray appearance to teeth. Talk to your dental hygienist about whether your child may need fluoride supplements.**



disease also have been linked to other life-threatening problems, including heart disease, diabetes, respiratory ailments, and premature, low birth-weight babies.



As with tooth decay, bacteria in plaque (the gummy film that forms on teeth) is the primary cause of inflammatory periodontal disease. In fact, these bacteria thrive right along and below the gum line. Help prevent tooth loss and potential life-threatening health problems caused by periodontal disease with these tips.

- Brush, floss, and rinse daily. Removing plaque along the gum line prevents bacteria in plaque from irritating your gums. Plaque that isn't removed turns into hard deposits that you can't remove with brushing and flossing. Remember to brush your teeth daily. Also, remember to brush your tongue every day.
- Choose an overall eating plan that provides food variety and balance. Good nutrition will help to build and maintain healthy gum tissue, and enhance your immune system. Shortages of certain nutrients, such as vitamin C, folic acid, and zinc, may weaken your gums' defenses against bacteria and increase your chances of periodontal disease.
- Have regular oral health check-ups. Besides checking for periodontal problems, a registered dental hygienist will remove plaque buildup and other irritants from between teeth and both above and below the gum line.

## Eating Right to Prevent Tooth Decay

Tooth decay occurs when bacteria in your mouth mix with the carbohydrates you eat (sugars and starches) to form acids in the plaque that clings to the surfaces of your teeth and along your gum line. These acids can dissolve tooth surface, causing tooth decay if they are not removed by brushing and flossing.

Your eating habits can help or hinder your chances of cavity-free teeth. The most important diet-related factors are:

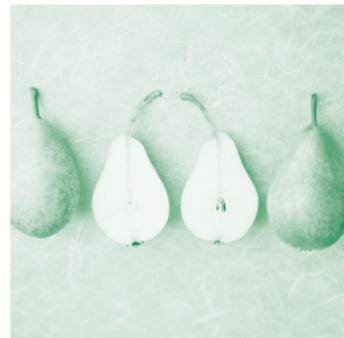


**What You Eat**—Any food that contains carbohydrate—pasta, bread, rice, chips, fruit, milk, as well as cake, cookies, and candy—can “feed” the bacteria in plaque. But foods that stick to your teeth allow plaque acids to continue their action long after you stop eating or drinking. This can include foods such as sweetened chewing gum, raisins, and other dried fruits, and some candies as well as starchy foods like breads, cereals, or chips that stick between your teeth or in the pits of your molars.

However, foods, like cheese, peanuts, lean protein, sugar-free chewing gum, and high-fiber fruits and vegetables may help protect your teeth from decay by increasing saliva flow, lowering acid levels, and cleaning your teeth of food particles during the chewing process. Drinking water throughout the day also will help reduce plaque buildup and food from sticking to your teeth.

**How Often You Eat**—The more often you eat carbohydrate foods, especially between meals, the more opportunity acids have to attack teeth. Sucking on hard candy, nibbling on chips or crackers, or slowly sipping a sweetened drink bathes teeth with plaque acids and continues for 20 to 40 minutes after finishing. Go easy on between-meal snacks, and when you do snack, try to eat the snack at one time rather than over a longer period. Whenever possible, brush or rinse your mouth after you snack.

In infants and young children, sucking on a bottle or sippy cup of formula, milk, fruit juice, or other sweetened liquid for prolonged periods of time can lead to serious decay of a child's primary teeth. If you offer your child a nap or night-time bottle or frequent drinks in a sippy cup, fill it with plain water.



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