



Your Oral Health

Dental Health Information Series



Diet and Your Oral Health

What we eat and drink affects our mouth. This section gives you information on the role a healthy diet can play in maintaining good oral health and resistance to many diseases.

What Can Cause Problems?

The dental plaque on your teeth is mostly made up of bacteria, which feed on sugar from food and drink, producing acids as a waste product. The acids then erode the teeth by dissolving the minerals on the tooth surface.

Most people think that sweets and lollies are the main foods to blame for tooth decay but bacteria not only use the sugar in sweets to create acid but can also use any food that contains sugars and other carbohydrates. This includes fruits, peanut butter, biscuits, crackers, potato chips, dried fruit, snack bars, muesli bars and popcorn to name a few. Especially harmful can be foods like raisins and peanut butter that stick to teeth where they provide a constant source of energy for bacteria. Acidic drinks include all fizzy drinks (including 'diet' drinks and carbonated mineral water), all cordials and fruit juices.

It's not practical to cut out these foods completely but it's good to know the basic facts about tooth-friendly eating and have a plan to control any potential damage they might do.

How to avoid diet-related mouth problems

Brush regularly

Most dental problems can be avoided by brushing twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste to remove any plaque that's built up.

The role of saliva

Saliva provides a strong protective film to the teeth and helps to wash away and neutralise the damaging acids. It also clears the mouth of debris. Recent research shows that cheese is one of the healthiest snacks for your teeth as it stimulates the saliva glands. Chewing sugar free gum after you've eaten will also do this.

Only eat 'safe' snacks and drinks between meals

If you want to snack between meals try to avoid sugary or acidic foods and drinks. If you can't avoid them, try and drink them through a straw to minimise the exposure to your teeth. Instead choose 'safe' snacks like fruits, vegetables, toast, nuts and cheese and wash it down with 'safe' drinks like milk and water (preferably fluoridated tap water).

Chew sugar-free gum

If it's not possible to brush your teeth an hour after eating, chew sugar-free gum to stimulate saliva which will help neutralise acids and keep your mouth free of food debris.

For more information on oral health and looking after your mouth, visit www.dentalhealthweek.com.au

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