



# Oral Health for Kids

Dental Health Information Series



## Food and Teeth

Diet plays an essential role in helping to keep children's teeth healthy, so it's important for them to be able to understand the differences between good and bad foods for teeth.

**Start by making two lists on the blackboard (see example below).**

Food and drinks that are good for your teeth	Food and drinks that can be bad for your teeth
Cheese	Biscuits
Apples	Sweets and lollies
Carrots	Sugary soft drinks
Banana	Chocolate
Milk	Cordial

**Teacher:** Ask pupils to think of foods on their own and then discuss why each food or drink listed is good or bad for our teeth. You can break up the discussion by focusing on four categories as a guide: good foods, sugars, acids and fluoride.

### Good Foods

Some foods like carrots and celery are really good for your teeth because they are fibrous and help to "clean" your teeth while you chew them. Cheese and fruit are ideal choices if you are going to have a snack. Some foods assist with protecting teeth – milk and some cheeses are recognised as having protective qualities to help prevent dental decay.

### Sugars

Typically foods that can contribute to dental decay are those high in sugar, such as concentrated fruit snack bars, sweets and lollies, muesli bars and sugary soft drinks and juices. This is because the sugar feeds the destructive bacteria in your mouth, which then puts acid on your teeth. Refined foods such as savoury, starchy crackers and chips can also have high carbohydrate (sugar) content, so it is important to check the food information panel on packaged foods to assist in determining foods and drinks with high carbohydrate or sugar content.

### Acids

Many beverages that are high in sugars are also acidic – that is they can have an erosive effect on your teeth. Soft drinks, sports drinks and energy drinks, along with fruit juices and cordials, often have high-acid levels, and can play a major role in the development of tooth erosion. These drinks should be limited and you should drink fluoridated tap water as much as possible. If only bottled water is available, this is much better than drinking sugary and acidic drinks, though it's important to remember that it doesn't contain fluoride, which helps to protect and strengthen teeth against dental decay.

### Fluoride

Fluoride is a natural mineral that strengthens tooth enamel and protects against decay. Most capital cities in Australia add fluoride to the water supply at recommended levels. Your dentist can tell you if your local water supply is fluoridated. In those areas that don't have water fluoridation, children have more decay rates than in areas with fluoridated water. Water – tap or bottled is always a better option than soft, sports and energy drinks, sugary juices and cordials.

Importantly, a healthy diet must be complemented by good oral hygiene - brushing and flossing teeth and regular dental check ups. Daily flossing and brushing greatly reduce the risk of tooth decay.

For more information on oral health and looking after your mouth, visit [www.dentalhealthweek.com.au](http://www.dentalhealthweek.com.au)

Dental Health Week brought to you by the Australian Dental Association Inc. Copyright 2011 ADA All Rights Reserved.

