



Oral Health for Kids

Dental Health Information Series



Tooth-Friendly Foods and Drinks

Foods

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.

It's not practical to cut out these foods completely but, it's good to remind them occasionally to think before they snack. If you can plant a useful seed in their minds about tooth-friendly eating you'll be giving them the best chance of enjoying healthy teeth for years to come.

So what foods provide a good alternative? Recent research shows that cheese is one of the healthiest snacks for your child's teeth. In addition to providing large amounts of much-needed calcium, cheese also does its part to fight cavities. Cheddar, Swiss and mozzarella all stimulate saliva glands to clear the mouth of debris. Saliva provides a strong protective film to the teeth and helps to wash away and neutralise the damaging acids. Other good snacks are nuts and fruit (as long as you wash it down with some water straight after you've eaten).

Drinks

Most kids can't resist a cold can of sparkling drink; and the occasional one isn't going to do too much harm. However, most kids drink more than the occasional can of soft drink. And what's more, they drink it throughout the day, which makes it more damaging.

Drinking soft drinks, sports drinks and even fruit juice coats your mouth with sugar for bacteria to feed on and produce acid that attacks tooth enamel.

Limiting these acid plaque attacks during the day is a great way to give your teeth a break. This means only drinking these drinks at meal times when your saliva is working at its hardest to wash away food particles and bacteria. Or, better still, drinking tap water which not only rinses out your mouth, but doesn't contain any acid and, in many parts of Australia, has the added benefit of containing fluoride.

The fact sheet on "Your Child's Diet" has some great tips on the best way to drink sugary and fizzy drinks like using a straw for example. You'll also find some information in there that might surprise you about why you shouldn't brush teeth straight after drinking sweet or acidic drinks.

Teach Your Child Tooth-Friendly Eating and Drinking

Remember these simple guidelines and maybe even choose a day to devote to tooth-friendly eating and drinking.

- Cut out all snack foods between meals. If your child has to have a snack to keep them going before dinner, make sure they eat only foods that will be kind to their teeth like cheese, nuts or fruit and get them to wash it down with a glass of water immediately after eating. Acid plaque attacks can last up to 20 minutes after you've eaten (even if you've just had a nibble). The more times you eat during the day the longer your teeth are going to be exposed to acid plaque.
- Also try and cut out all fizzy, sugary and sports drinks, at least between meals during the day. Even better, try and cut them out completely and drink tap water instead.
- Only eat sweet things at the end of a meal when your saliva is working at its best to wash away food particles and bacteria. Better still, stick to cheese or fruit after a meal.
- After every meal wash food down with water (not sugary carbonated or sports drinks) and chew sugar free gum for 10 minutes to stimulate saliva flow. All this will help to quickly get rid of food particles and bacteria instead of allowing them to sit there causing damage to teeth.

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

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