

PREVENTING TOOTH DECAY

1. **It's very important to brush regularly to keep the teeth as clean as possible.** Bacteria in dental plaque feed off of sugar alcohols that are formed from the breakdown of carbohydrates and sugary foods. The bacteria and sugar alcohols combine to create acids that begin to demineralize the enamel. Tooth decay begins when the pH level of saliva falls to the critical level of pH 5.5 (very acidic). Normal saliva (saliva present in the mouth when no food is being consumed) is neutral.
2. **Try to avoid regularly consuming sticky sweet foods such as raisins, honey, sweetened peanut butter, toffee and chewy candies.** These foods tend to stick to the teeth and are not easily washed off by saliva. They will sit in the grooves of teeth and can increase the chance of the tooth becoming demineralized. It's a good idea to rinse out your mouth with water after consuming a sweet sticky snack.
3. **It's actually not the best idea to brush your teeth right after eating something sweet and sticky.** The enamel is temporarily softer the first 30 minutes after being exposed to the acids created by sugar reacting with oral bacteria. The mechanical force, of the tooth brush bristles, generated while brushing can erode the softened enamel and actually aid the decay process. It's best to wait for about a half hour or so and then thoroughly brush to remove any remaining food particles.
4. **Soda, iced teas, sweetened drinks, and even natural fruit juices all can contribute to decay when consumed regularly.** Soda has the greatest potential for decay because it has a high sugar content and is carbonated. The carbonation is acidic and combined with the high sugar content can quickly erode the enamel and lead to rampant tooth decay. Milk and water are the best beverages to consume regularly. Milk contains Calcium and helps to neutralize other acidic or sugary foods when consumed along with them. Natural fruit juices are part of a healthy diet and are fine as long as they are drunk along with meals.
5. **A serious condition of rampant tooth decay commonly referred to as "baby bottle decay" can occur if infants and children are put to bed with a bottle that contains any liquid other than water.** Even a bottle of milk can contribute to decay because milk contains sugar enzymes that can break down into sugar alcohols. During sleep the teeth are more vulnerable to decay because the saliva flow in the mouth is greatly decreased while resting. The saliva not only helps to wash away food and bacteria particles from the tooth, but it also contains many minerals that help to mineralize the enamel. It is also not a good idea to dip a soother in honey or a sweet liquid as this can also contribute to decay of the front teeth.

6. **Eat desserts or other sugary snacks along with your meals or shortly thereafter, not in between.** The proteins, fats, and minerals present in a balanced meal help to neutralize the acidity created by sugary snacks. Another idea would be to eat a piece of cheese or a couple spoonfuls of non-sweetened yogurt after consuming a sweet snack.

SUGGESTIONS FOR HELPING MALNOURISHED CHILDREN PREVENT DECAY

1. Children who have suffered from malnutrition and vitamin deficiencies in their early years, often have poorly formed enamel (Enamel Hypoplasia). The malformed enamel is softer than regular enamel and can decay much more easily. Children with Enamel Hypoplasia should have regular fluoride treatments. These treatments can be in several forms. There are fluoridated mouth rinses that they can rinse with daily. After rinsing for one minute with the fluoride rinse, the child should spit it out completely (ingesting the rinse can be harmful and upset their stomach), and avoid eating or rinsing with water for a half hour after. This allows the fluoride mineral to stick to the tooth longer and better strengthen the enamel. There are also chewable fluoride tablets or gels that can be brushed on the teeth.
2. Children with Enamel Hypoplasia should brush at least three times a day for two minutes each time. It is also a good idea to floss regularly. Flossing removes plaque that collects between the teeth – even the best tooth brushing cannot access the plaque between teeth. It is extremely important that children with poorly developed teeth be kept plaque free as much as possible to minimize the chance of decay. Also, it is important to brush with a fluoridated toothpaste. Specialty toothpastes do exist that have an increased amount of fluoride. These pastes are a good option for children who are more prone to decay.
3. It is more crucial for children with Enamel Hypoplasia to avoid a regular diet of sweets, candies, soda, etc. Regular consumption of dairy products such as milk, cheese, and yogurt and some proteins from meats (if possible) will help to prevent or slow down the decay process. Once a tooth begins to decay, however, even a healthy diet cannot restore or repair the area of damaged tooth structure.