

## Diet and oral health

# How eating and drink habits affect our teeth

### Eating affects your oral health

The reality is our eating habits play a major role in tooth decay, which is a diet related disease. Sugars in the food and drinks we eat are taken up by bacteria, producing acids that attack the outer layer of tooth enamel to cause decay.

Our saliva helps our teeth recover from these attacks through a process of neutralising the acids. However, if we frequently snack between meals, there is no rest period for teeth to undergo this recovery process, which may mean that, over time, a cavity forms as a result of these sustained acidic attacks.

### Water, water everywhere

Drink it up! It's calorie free, there are no ingredient labels to stress over, and it's almost free! Even better, tap water in most areas of Australia contains fluoride, one of the easiest and most beneficial ways to help prevent tooth decay. Making water your beverage of choice and regularly sipping it throughout the day, including with and right after meals, makes a real difference to the health of your teeth.

*At your next dentist appointment ask them about extra tips for protecting your teeth from the effects of food and drinks.*

### WHAT YOU CAN DO TO MAINTAIN HEALTHY TEETH:

1. Limit sugary treats to meal times, rather than between meals.
2. Drink fluoridated tap water throughout the day and after meals.
3. Chew sugar-free gum after eating.

### Watch what you eat

It is not just the obvious sweet foods and drinks such as lollies and soft drinks that can cause decay. Frequent snacking on foods with hidden sugars like biscuits, crackers, cereals, chips and even dried fruit (these also break down into sugars in the mouth) can cause acid attacks on your tooth enamel.

Here are two teeth friendly habits that you can adopt to reduce your risk of tooth decay.

- Have three regular meal times a day, rather than snacking and grazing.
- Limit your sugary treats to be part of a meal, rather than as a snack.

### Gum anyone?

Chewing sugar-free gum (and that's the crucial qualifier, it must be sugar-free!) may not be the first thing that springs to mind when you're thinking about good dietary habits to benefit your teeth. Studies have shown that chewing sugar-free gum for 20 minutes after eating can prompt your mouth to produce more saliva, which helps neutralise decay-causing acid attacks.



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