



HEALTHY SNACKS FOR HEALTHY TEETH

Dental decay has been linked to sweet and acid foods. Plaque bacteria in the mouth change sweet food into acid, which causes tooth decay. It is very important to reduce the *number of times* per day that decay-producing food or drink is taken. Children at high risk for the decay need to have gaps between meals, so they only eat five times a day. This reduces the amount of acid in the mouth. Drinks of water and milk are welcome between meals because they reduce acid on teeth.

Tooth-damaging food and drinks include: sweetened drinks such as juice, cordial, Milo, Quik, Ribena, sports drinks and soft drinks (including sugar-free drinks), and sweet foods including dried fruit, fruit fingers, honey, jam, Nutella or muesli bars. High starch foods such as Crisps, Twisties and Cheezels are also a cause of decay. Having these between meals or at school causes cavities. Children will remain at high risk if their diet is not modified.

Frequent consumption of fruit between meals can damage tooth enamel, as fruit can be acidic. When children eat fruit between meals, it is advisable that they follow up with a small square of cheese or a drink of milk or water, as this washes out the acidity from the mouth. Going to bed with an apple in the mouth is not safe.

Tooth-friendly snacks include: rice cakes, dry biscuits, plain popcorn, nuts, cheese slices, peanut butter, vegemite, butter, cut-up vegetables with dips such as tzatziki or hummus. For a healthy, balanced diet, children need **three pieces of fruit and five vegetables a day**, as well as a high intake of grains and protein and three intakes of dairy products.

Before going to bed, children should clean their teeth with a toothbrush and toothpaste (a pea-size ball of low fluoride toothpaste for children under 7), and then have nothing to eat or drink other than water.

Helpful hints:

- Rather than having lollies in the house buy a treat for your child once a week (like a plain chocolate Fredo Frog, an icy-pole or an ice-cream that is not sticky and goes through the mouth quickly. Jelly snakes, Chuppa-Chups or Minties are bad because they stay in the mouth for a long time and they are sticky. Have this at the end of a meal, not between meals.
- Do grocery shopping without the children and think savoury, vegetable – crunchy not sweet.
- At parties, children should eat all the lollies at once. If unable to brush immediately, chewing sugar-free gum for 10 minutes is a good alternative. This type of gum stimulates saliva flow that washes out the mouth
- If making lolly bags for parties, include sugar-free chewing gum and non-sticky things.
- Remember that it is the *number of times* that the teeth are exposed to sweet, sticky and acid things that is important, not the amount eaten.

Patients at high risk for tooth decay should consider:

- sorbitol or xylitol containing chewing gums (so long as there are no jaw problems)
- High fluoride tooth paste
- Tooth Mousse
- Chlorhexidine mouthwash twice daily for 2 weeks every 3 months



DENTAL HEALTH OF THE NEW BORN AND ONGOING DENTAL CARE

Parental/Grandparental habits:

- Do not taste the food on the same spoon/fork or taste from the child's bottle
- Do not share a toothbrush with the child
- From 0-2 years of age, use a cloth or a very small, soft toothbrush to clean the teeth, and begin flossing as soon as teeth come into contact. Do not use toothpaste
- The child should have his/her first check-up when by age 4. This is to acclimatize the child with the dental environment. It is often best to bring him/her to your own check up to watch what happens in the surgery. However, if no teeth have come through by 18 months, a dentist should be consulted
- From age 2-6, use a small-headed, soft toothbrush with a very small (pea-sized) amount of infant's toothpaste. This has a lower concentration of fluoride, a mild taste and does not foam as much, making it safer and nicer for the child
- Try to teach the child to spit out the excess toothpaste once he/she is old enough
- Brushing should occur AT LEAST once a day, preferably at night
- DO NOT reward the child with sugar-containing foods. Try sugar-free lollies, or rewarding in some other fashion
- Once teeth have erupted, ensure the child is not put to bed with a bottle of milk/juice. If a bottle is required, water is the only suitable drink.
- Encourage sugar-free chewing gum between meals when old enough
- LOLLYPOPS and other STICKY FOODS ARE TERRIBLE. They contain a lot of sugar and stay in the mouth for long periods of time.

Child's eating habits:

- Fluoridated water (Melbourne tapwater) is fine, and a very important source of fluoride for the child. Milk is a great source of calcium and is also a great drink for kids.
- Fruit juices, sports drinks and soft drinks contain sugar and are acidic. Even those that are sugar-free are acidic and can lead to both dental decay and to erosion (i.e. acid dissolves teeth). Drinks of this sort should be limited, but should the child drink these it is best to use a straw
- Fruits and vegetables are the best snacks along with cheeses (examples include cheese sticks, carrot sticks, celery sticks) but remember fruit contains sugar (and many are acidic) and too many a day can also cause problems
- Breakfast is extremely important in the prevention of tooth decay, especially cereal with milk
- Occasional sugary snacks, fruit juices and soft drinks are fine
- It is much better to have a lot of sugar in one go than a little bit of sugar over a long period (i.e. snacking on sugary foods), and the best time for sugar is with a meal or shortly afterwards, particularly dinner right before brushing the teeth