

Diet and Oral Health

Your body is like a complex machine. The foods you choose as fuel and how often you “fill up” affect your general health and that of your teeth and gums. Many dentists are concerned that their patients are consuming record numbers of sugar-filled sodas, sweetened fruit drinks, and non-nutritious snacks that affect their teeth. These items generally have little if any nutritional value and over time they can take a toll on teeth.

Eating patterns and food choices among children and teens are important factors that affect how quickly youngsters may develop tooth decay. When bacteria (plaque) come into contact with sugar in the mouth, acid is produced, which attacks the teeth for 20 minutes or more. This can eventually result in tooth decay.

Not sure you're getting the nutrients, vitamins and minerals needed by your body (and your teeth and gums)? Check out the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Web site [Link opens in separate window](#). Pop-up Blocker may need to be disabled.. The USDA oversees the nutritional health of the nation. The agency's dietary recommendations are designed to promote optimal health and to prevent obesity-related diseases including cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes and cancers.

The government's recommendations recognize that people have different dietary needs at various stages of life. They offer guidance for children and adults based on their levels of physical activity. Your physician or a registered dietician can also provide suggestions for your daily food intake.

Foods that contain sugars of any kind can contribute to tooth decay. Almost all foods, including milk or vegetables, have some type of sugar. However, they shouldn't be removed from our diets because many of them contain important nutrients. And they add pleasure to eating. To help control the amount of sugar you consume, read food labels and choose foods and beverages that are low in added sugars. Added sugars often are present in soft drinks, candy, cookies and pastries.

If your diet lacks certain nutrients, it may be more difficult for tissues in your mouth to resist infection. This may contribute to periodontal (gum) disease, a major cause of tooth loss in adults. Although poor nutrition does not cause periodontal disease directly, many researchers believe that the disease progresses faster and could be more severe in people with nutrient-poor diets

What can you do?

- * Maintain a healthy diet.
- * Make sure water is readily available.
- * Limit the number of between-meal snacks. When you must snack, choose nutritious foods that are low in sugar.
- * Brush thoroughly twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste that has the American Dental Association's Seal of Acceptance.
- * Floss or use another kind of interdental cleaner daily to remove plaque (a thin film of bacteria) from under the gums and between teeth.
- * Schedule regular dental visits for checkups and cleanings.
- * Keep a food diary for a week. Record every item you eat and drink, including hard candies or chewing gum that contains sugar. Compare the diary to the food Pyramid recommendations.