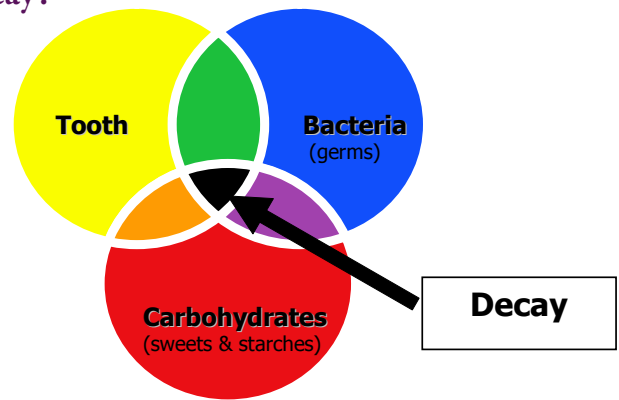


Tooth Decay

What is tooth decay?

Three things are needed for tooth decay to occur - a tooth, carbohydrates (sweets and starches), and bacteria (germs). Bacteria in the mouth use sweet and starchy foods to make acid. The acid causes a hole or cavity in the tooth.

If tooth decay is severe, it can cause difficulty with eating and sleeping. Pain or tooth loss from decay can also affect a child's ability to do well in school or an adult's ability to work.



How can tooth decay be prevented?

Limit the use of bottles and sippy cups.

As soon as a baby's first teeth appear - usually by age 6 months - the child is at risk for tooth decay.

- A bottle used at naptime or bedtime should only be filled with water.
- Juice or other sugary liquids (chocolate milk, soda pop, Karo syrup, sports drinks, etc.) should not be put in a baby's bottle. When juice is offered, it should be in a cup.
- Children should be weaned from the bottle and encouraged to drink from a cup by age 1.
- If a sippy cup is used between meals, at naptime, or at bedtime, it should only be filled with water.
- Frequent drinking of any other liquid from a sippy cup should be avoided.

Limit soft drinks and other drinks with sugar.

Soft drinks and other drinks with sugar (fruit juice, lemonade, sports drink) increase your risk for cavities. Sipping on these beverages throughout the day causes repeated acid attacks. Soft drinks (regular and diet) are especially harmful because they have a high acid content that can wear away tooth enamel.

- Choose sugar-free beverages like water, coffee, tea, and sugar-free noncarbonated drinks to quench your thirst between meals.
- Drink 6 to 8 glasses of water every day to decrease the acid in your mouth. Make sure the water is fluoridated to keep your tooth enamel strong.

Limit snacks between meals.

Eating sweet and starchy foods throughout the day causes repeated acid attacks on the teeth. This increases the risk for tooth decay.

- Sweet and starchy foods should be limited to mealtime. Foods like dried fruit, chewy candy, potato chips, and crackers stick to your teeth, so they are especially harmful.
- Other foods that stay in your mouth a long time like hard candy, breath mints, and cough drops also cause repeated acid attacks. Choose sugarless products to protect your teeth.
- Choose foods that help prevent cavities such as cheese, yogurt, and milk. Fresh fruits and vegetables are also healthy choices for snacks.

Brush and floss your teeth daily

Daily home care is important to remove the germs in your mouth and to strengthen your teeth with fluoride.

- Brush twice a day with fluoride toothpaste.
- Floss at least once a day, especially at bedtime.
- After brushing and flossing at night, do not eat or drink anything except water.