

Snack Smart for Healthy Teeth

Snacking is an important part of daily food intake for adults and children. Snacks provide us with an opportunity to keep our energy up throughout the day and give our bodies nutrients such as calcium and iron. However, some snacks are better for our teeth than others and it is important to consider how often and what types of snacks we eat.

What can happen to my teeth when I eat certain snacks? How often should I eat snacks?

When we eat foods that contain sugar, the sugar combines with bacteria in our mouths and forms an acid. When your teeth are exposed to this acid it can contribute to decay (cavities).



To prevent this, try to avoid constant snacking. Have meals and snacks at set times in the day (e.g. one snack between each meal) to decrease your teeth's exposure to acid. Every time you eat or drink something, it takes your mouth 20 minutes to neutralize the acid produced by the bacteria. Eating sweets (dessert) right after a meal is better than eating these on their own.

What is a healthy snack?

To prepare a healthy snack include at least two of the four food groups (vegetables and fruit, grain products, milk and alternatives, meat and alternatives). Foods that are higher in carbohydrate and sugar should be eaten with a food that is high in protein- this will help you keep your energy levels up during the day. Food such as low-fat cheese, peanut butter and eggs contain protein; add a few crackers or some bread for an energy rich snack. When choosing grains, choose whole grains; the higher fibre also means that these foods will stick to your teeth less. Choose whole vegetables and fruit rather than juice - the vegetables and fruit are higher in fibre and much lower in sugar than juice.

How do different foods affect my teeth?

Soft, sticky foods that are high in sugar can stay in your mouth longer and may lead to cavities. These types of food include sweet and sour candies, dried fruit, fruit leather, and raisins. On the other hand, higher protein foods can help prevent "acid attacks" and reduce your risk of tooth decay. For example, when eating things like dried fruit, crackers and soft bread that can stick in your teeth, combine it with a protein like low-fat cheese, peanuts or nuts and seeds.

What about drinks? Can they harm my teeth?

Many drinks have sugars in them, either added or naturally occurring. Drinks high in acid (e.g., pop, fruit juice, lemonade) can wear away your tooth enamel, making your teeth more sensitive and at risk for cavities. Even diet pop has acid that is harmful to teeth. Water is the best drink to have between meals.

How can I protect and care for my teeth when I eat or drink?

Things that help protect your teeth:

- Rinse with water
- Chew a piece of sugarless gum
- Eat a piece of low-fat cheese (protects teeth)

Snacks are a great way to keep you energized throughout the day. Your teeth are an important part of your body. When you choose snacks that are healthy for your teeth, these foods will be healthy for your body as well.



For more information, please call the
Health ACTION Line at **1-800-660-5853**
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