

How Your Diet Affects Your Smile



This sheet will give you tips on what to eat to keep your mouth healthy. You know some of these, and others might be a surprise. Follow these tips on what to eat to care for your smile and to help others do the same.



HOW DOES MY DIET AFFECT THE HEALTH OF MY MOUTH?

The foods you eat and how often you eat them can affect your general health as well as your oral health (teeth, gums, and tongue).

There are foods that are bad for your teeth, such as sugary, starchy, sticky, and acidic foods (see list below). These foods can:

- Break down the enamel on your teeth and cause tooth decay (cavities)
- Make your teeth sensitive and discolored

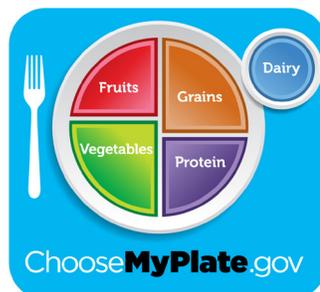
There are also foods you should eat to get the nutrients you need to keep your teeth healthy. If you do not get certain nutrients, you can more easily get infections in your mouth. This may lead to gum disease and tooth loss.



WHAT KINDS OF FOODS KEEP MY TEETH HEALTHY?

A balanced diet that is rich in vitamins, minerals, and fresh fruit and vegetables can help keep your teeth healthy. Eat a variety of healthy foods from each food group (fruits, vegetables, grains, protein, and dairy). These foods are especially good for your teeth:

- **Fruits and vegetables:** Choose fruits and vegetables that are crunchy, such as apples, pears, celery, and carrots. They help scrub plaque from your teeth. Dark, leafy vegetables (such as broccoli and kale) are also good for your teeth because they have a lot of vitamins and minerals.
- **Nuts and seeds:** These foods have minerals that keep your enamel strong.
- **Dairy:** Yogurt, cheese, and milk all have minerals (calcium and phosphates) that are important for healthy teeth. When eating dairy, be sure they are low-fat (1%) or fat-free (skim).



This MyPlate illustration demonstrates how these food groups can make it onto your plate for a meal. With “Nuts and seeds” being a great source of protein and healthy fats.



WHAT KINDS OF FOODS ARE BAD FOR MY TEETH?

Try to limit these kinds of foods:



Sugary foods: Candy, sweets, and sodas all have sugar in them. Sugar feeds the bad bacteria in your mouth that cause tooth decay. To limit sugar, read the nutrition facts and ingredient labels so you know how much sugar is in foods.



Starchy foods: Starches break down into sugar, so these foods lead to tooth decay in the same way sugary foods do. Starch is found in breads, crackers, pasta, and many snack foods. Choose these foods carefully. Whole grains are best.



Sticky foods: Chewy candy and other sticky foods are not easily washed away by a drink or your saliva.



Acidic foods: Foods that are high in acid include: citrus fruits, sodas, coffee, and alcohol. Acid can harm your teeth by destroying the enamel.



WHAT ELSE CAN I DO TO KEEP MY TEETH HEALTHY?

- Brush your teeth 2 times each day. But if you eat or drink something with a lot of sugar, try to wait at least 1 hour before brushing your teeth. If you brush right after drinking or eating food with sugar, it can cause tiny particles of enamel to be brushed away.
- Floss (clean between your teeth) at least 1 time each day.
- Drink plenty of water. Drink tap water instead of bottled water. Tap water is more likely to have fluoride.
- Chew sugar-free gum. Chewing gum helps your mouth make saliva (spit). This can help remove the sugar that causes tooth decay.
- Limit the number of snacks you eat. Eating food as a meal causes less harm to teeth than eating a lot of snacks each day. This is because you make more saliva, which helps wash away the sugar that causes tooth decay. If you do have a snack, make sure it is something healthy.
- Visit your dentist 2 times every year (every 6 months).

SUMMARY

The main things you can do to support good oral health in yourself and others:



- Eat a balanced diet to keep your teeth and gums healthy.
- Try to limit or avoid foods that are sugary, starchy, sticky, or acidic.
- Brush your teeth 2 times each day.
- Floss your teeth at least 1 time each day.
- Visit your dentist 2 times every year (every 6 months).
- Teach others how to use good oral health habits



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