

Eating for a Healthy Mouth

Your mouth, teeth, and gums are more than just tools for eating. They're essential for chewing and swallowing—the first steps in the digestion process. Your mouth is your body's initial point of contact with the nutrients you consume. So what you put in your mouth impacts not only your general health but also that of your teeth and gums. In fact, if your nutrition is poor, the first signs often show up in your mouth.

Snacking & Dental Health

For dental health, it's recommended that people limit eating and drinking between meals. Of course, sometimes eating between meals must happen. Unfortunately, most people choose foods like sweets and chips for snacks; foods that harm teeth by promoting tooth decay. If you do snack, make it a nutritious choice—such as cheese, yogurt, fruits, vegetables or nuts—for your overall health and the health of your teeth.

Foods That Harm Your Dental Health

Empty calorie foods such as candy (especially hard or sticky candies like lollipops, mints, taffy and caramel), sweets like cookies, cakes and muffins, and snack foods like chips are a cause for dental concern, not only because they offer no nutritional value, but because the amount and type of sugar that they contain that can adhere to teeth. The bacteria in your mouth feed off these sugars, releasing acids, and that's what leads to tooth decay.

Sugar-containing drinks—soda, lemonade, juice and sweetened coffee or tea (iced or hot)—are particularly harmful because sipping them causes a constant sugar bath over teeth, which promotes tooth decay.

Nutritious, acidic foods like tomatoes and citrus fruits can have acidic effects on tooth enamel, too, so eat them as part of a meal, not by themselves. Dried fruits, including raisins, are also good choices for a healthy diet, but since they are sticky and adhere to teeth, the plaque acids that they produce continue to harm teeth long after you stop eating them. Opt for a piece of fresh fruit instead.

Foods That Benefit Your Dental Health

Cheese, milk, plain yogurt, calcium-fortified tofu, leafy greens and almonds, are foods that may benefit tooth health thanks to their high amounts of calcium and other nutrients they provide. Protein-rich foods like meat, poultry, fish, milk and eggs are the best sources of phosphorus. Both of these minerals play a critical role in dental health, by protecting and rebuilding tooth enamel.

Fruits and vegetables are good choices for a healthy smile since they are high in water and fiber, which balance the sugars they contain and help to clean the teeth. These foods also help stimulate saliva production, which washes harmful acids and food particles away from teeth and helps neutralize acid, protecting teeth from decay. Plus, many contain vitamin C (important for healthy gums and quick healing of wounds) and vitamin A (another key nutrient in building tooth enamel).

