



Nutrition and Oral Health

How Your Diet Affects Your Teeth and Gums

Why Nutrition Matters

Good nutrition is essential for maintaining healthy teeth, gums, and the tissues of the mouth. Every time you eat or drink, your choices affect your oral health. While brushing, flossing, and regular dental visits are important, a balanced diet plays a major role in preventing tooth decay, supporting healthy gums, and protecting tooth enamel.

Healthy eating benefits not only your mouth but also your overall health.

The Connection Between Diet and Oral Health

The bacteria naturally present in the mouth feed on sugars and other fermentable carbohydrates found in many foods and beverages. As these bacteria digest sugars, they produce acids that attack tooth enamel.

Each acid attack can last for approximately **20 to 30 minutes** after eating or drinking. Frequent snacking or sipping sugary beverages throughout the day increases the amount of time your teeth are exposed to these acids, raising the risk of cavities.

Fortunately, saliva helps neutralize acids and repair early enamel damage through a process called **remineralization**, especially when fluoride is present.

Foods That Support Healthy Teeth

A balanced diet provides the nutrients needed to build and maintain strong teeth and healthy gums.

Choose foods such as:

Dairy Products

Milk, yogurt, and cheese provide:

- Calcium
- Phosphorus
- Protein

These nutrients help strengthen tooth enamel and support healthy bones.

Fruits and Vegetables

Fresh fruits and vegetables provide:

- Vitamins
- Minerals
- Fiber
- Antioxidants

Crunchy vegetables may also help stimulate saliva production, which naturally protects teeth.

Lean Proteins

Foods such as:

- Fish
- Poultry
- Eggs
- Beans
- Lentils

provide protein and minerals needed for healthy oral tissues.

Whole Grains

Whole grains supply:

- Fiber
- B vitamins
- Iron
- Magnesium

These nutrients contribute to overall health and support healthy gum tissues.

Water

Water is the best beverage for oral health.

It helps:

- Wash away food particles
- Dilute sugars and acids
- Maintain saliva production
- Reduce dry mouth

When available, **fluoridated community water** also helps strengthen tooth enamel and reduce the risk of cavities.

Foods and Drinks That Increase the Risk of Tooth Decay

Some foods are more likely to contribute to cavities, especially when consumed frequently.

Limit:

- Candy
- Cookies
- Cakes
- Sweet pastries
- Sugary breakfast cereals
- Soft drinks
- Energy drinks
- Sports drinks
- Sweetened coffee beverages
- Sweetened teas

Sticky foods that remain on the teeth for extended periods can also increase the risk of tooth decay.

Sugar Is Not the Only Concern

Many starchy foods can also contribute to cavities because they break down into sugars in the mouth.

Examples include:

- Chips
- Crackers
- White bread
- Pretzels

These foods may become trapped between teeth, allowing bacteria to produce acids over a prolonged period.

Acidic Foods and Beverages

Acidic foods and drinks can gradually wear away tooth enamel.

Examples include:

- Soft drinks
- Citrus juices
- Sports drinks
- Energy drinks
- Sour candies

Acid erosion is different from cavities because the acid comes directly from the food or beverage rather than from bacteria.

If you consume acidic drinks:

- Drink them with meals rather than sipping throughout the day.
 - Rinse your mouth with water afterward.
 - Wait about **30 minutes** before brushing your teeth to avoid brushing softened enamel.
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Smart Snacking

The number of times you eat during the day is just as important as what you eat.

To help protect your teeth:

- Limit frequent snacking.
- Choose healthy snacks such as cheese, nuts (when appropriate), vegetables, or plain yogurt.
- Drink water instead of sugary beverages between meals.

Giving your mouth time to recover between meals allows saliva to neutralize acids and repair early enamel damage.

Vitamins and Minerals for Oral Health

Several nutrients support healthy teeth and gums.

Calcium

Helps build and maintain strong teeth and bones.

Sources include:

- Milk
 - Cheese
 - Yogurt
 - Fortified plant-based beverages
 - Leafy green vegetables
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Vitamin D

Helps the body absorb calcium.

Sources include:

- Fatty fish
 - Fortified dairy products
 - Egg yolks
 - Safe sunlight exposure
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Vitamin C

Supports healthy gums and wound healing.

Sources include:

- Citrus fruits
 - Strawberries
 - Bell peppers
 - Tomatoes
 - Broccoli
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Phosphorus

Works with calcium to strengthen teeth.

Sources include:

- Meat
 - Fish
 - Dairy products
 - Beans
 - Nuts
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Nutrition Throughout Life

Healthy eating supports oral health at every age.

- **Children** need adequate nutrition for proper tooth development.
 - **Teenagers** benefit from balanced diets that support growing teeth and bones.
 - **Adults** can reduce the risk of cavities and gum disease through healthy eating.
 - **Older adults** benefit from nutrient-rich foods that help maintain oral tissues and reduce the effects of dry mouth.
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Good Nutrition and Daily Oral Care

Healthy eating works best when combined with:

- Brushing twice daily with fluoride toothpaste
- Cleaning between your teeth every day
- Drinking fluoridated water when available
- Visiting your dentist regularly
- Avoiding tobacco products

No single food can prevent cavities. Daily oral hygiene remains essential.

Key Takeaways

- ✓ A healthy diet supports strong teeth and healthy gums.
 - ✓ Frequent consumption of sugary foods and drinks increases the risk of tooth decay.
 - ✓ Water is the healthiest beverage for your teeth.
 - ✓ Limit frequent snacking and sugary beverages.
 - ✓ Calcium, vitamin D, vitamin C, and phosphorus help maintain oral health.
 - ✓ Good nutrition and good oral hygiene work together to protect your smile.
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References

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