What you eat may not only affect your general health – it may also affect the health of your mouth. One of the biggest dangers is tooth decay. It’s caused by plaque (a sticky film of bacteria that naturally forms on your teeth) and the food you eat. Plaque feeds on sugar and starches found in your food. This forms an acid that attacks your tooth enamel, causing tooth decay.

**Here are some tips to avoid tooth decay:**

- **Snack smart.** If you need a snack, grab some fruit, vegetables or whole grains. Try to avoid hard candy, mints and sticky sweets that stay in your mouth for a long time. They may taste sweet, but they can cause tooth decay. And, after any snack, drink plenty of water to help wash away acid.

- **Limit sugar and starch.** Remember, sugary and starchy foods can lead to tooth decay, so try to limit them. Also, try nibbling on cheddar, Monterey jack or Swiss cheese after you eat. It increases the amount of saliva in your mouth, which helps fight tooth decay.

- **Protect your teeth.** Don’t chew on ice or popcorn kernels. Don’t use your teeth as tools. And don’t smoke or use tobacco which can lead to gum disease or worse – oral cancer.

**Brush, floss and be healthy.**

- **Use fluoride toothpaste.** Brush your teeth at least twice a day – and always at bedtime. Replace your soft-bristled brush every three to four months or whenever it starts to look frayed.

- **Floss daily.** It’s very important to add flossing to your routine because a toothbrush can’t reach in between your teeth where tartar and plaque can form.

- **Visit your dentist.** Make regular trips to the dentist to help reduce tartar buildup. While you’re there, ask your dentist if you’re brushing and flossing the right way.

**The hard truth about soft drinks**

- **One out of every four drinks consumed in America today is soda.**

- **People drink more soda than any other beverage, including milk, beer, coffee and water.**

- **Some sodas have as many as 11 teaspoons of sugar per serving.**