

VitaMin

Vital health information in a minute

Brush up on tooth decay



What causes cavities?

A cavity is caused by tooth decay, a common but preventable problem. Tooth decay comes from a sticky film of bacteria on your teeth – also called “plaque” – and by the food you eat. The plaque feeds on the sugar and starches in your food. It turns into an acid that attacks your tooth enamel, causing cavities.

How to prevent cavities

You know it’s important to brush and floss every day. But here are some other tips to help keep cavities at bay:

- Drink up. Water can help wash away the sugar and starch from your food.
- Don’t be sweet. Avoid candy and mints that stay in your mouth for a long time.
- Cheese, please. Nibbling on cheese makes you produce more saliva, which helps fight tooth decay.
- Visit your dentist. A regular cleaning and dental exam can help prevent tooth decay.

A mouthful about gum disease

Gum disease is an infection that occurs when bacteria hides under your gums and attacks your gums and bones. But the effects go beyond your mouth. Gum disease has been linked to diabetes, heart disease, stroke and premature births. To prevent this disease, get regular dental checkups.

Fluoride facts

Fluoride is a mineral that naturally exists in water and many foods. It’s also a key factor in preventing tooth decay. Fluoride helps fight plaque and can even reverse early tooth decay. There are two main ways to make sure you get enough:

1. Toothpaste. Make sure your toothpaste has fluoride in it.
2. Water. Drink water with fluoride. Chances are, the water from your tap already has the right amount.

<http://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/publications/factsheets/adult.htm>

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