

## Feeding a healthy smile



**A** number of foods and drinks can affect the risk of developing cavities, dental erosion, and dry mouth.

### CAVITIES

A layer of bacteria called plaque normally builds up on teeth. Plaque bacteria use sugar for food and produce acids that can cause cavities. To protect your teeth, the American Dental Association recommends that you limit sugary beverages and snacks.

### Foods and drinks to avoid

There are a number of sugar-sweetened beverages, including sodas, juice, and sports drinks. Foods like frozen meals, flavored yogurts, and sauces like ketchup and barbecue sauce also have added sugar. Gummy candies, many chewable medicines and vitamins, and breadlike foods including chips and pretzels, stick to the teeth and increase the risk of cavities.

Infant formulas, baby foods, and fruit juice also can increase the risk of cavities. The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry recommends that infants younger than 1 year avoid juice completely.<sup>1</sup> Older infants and children should not suck on bottles or sippy cups filled with juice for long periods, and they should not go to sleep with a juice-filled bottle or sippy cup.

### Foods and drinks to choose

Fruits and vegetables (fresh or frozen) with natural sugars are a good choice. Dairy products, like whole milk, cheese, and plain yogurt (which you can sweeten with fresh fruit) also may be helpful.<sup>2</sup> These types of healthy foods provide nutrients, like calcium and vitamin C, that your body can use to help strengthen teeth and gums.

### Tips

Check food labels to see whether there are added sugars in your foods or drinks. Guidelines recommend that foods and drinks have no more than 10% of your daily calories in added sugars.<sup>3</sup>

Chewing sugar-free gum sweetened with xylitol also can reduce the risk of cavities. Chewing gum increases saliva, which can reduce acid in the mouth, and may contain calcium, fluoride, and other minerals.<sup>4</sup>

### DENTAL EROSION

Dental erosion is the gradual wearing away of the hard outside surface of the teeth caused by repeated or prolonged contact with acid. The acid in some foods and drinks can cause dental erosion.

### Foods and drinks to avoid

Acidic foods and drinks, such as soft drinks, juice, and some sports drinks, and acidic snacks and candies can increase the risk of erosion.

### Foods and drinks to choose

Milk and yogurt may reduce acid in the mouth. Water is a good beverage choice. If you eat or drink products high in acids, rinsing your mouth with water also may be helpful.

### Tips

Limiting the exposure of teeth to acidic foods (including candies) or drinks can help. Using a straw when drinking can also help reduce the contact of teeth with acidic beverages.

### DRY MOUTH

Dry mouth can cause difficulties in tasting, chewing, swallowing, and speaking and can increase the risk of cavities. Certain foods and drinks can contribute to dry mouth.

### Foods and drinks to avoid

Limit breadlike snacks, such as chips or pretzels, and acidic foods or beverages. Alcohol and caffeine-containing beverages can cause dry mouth.

### Foods and drinks to choose

Drinking water and sucking on (not chewing) ice can moisten the mouth. Sugar-free gums and candies may increase the flow of saliva. Because dry mouth increases the risk of cavities, see the above section on cavities for foods and drinks that may reduce this risk.

### CONCLUSIONS

Food and drink choices can affect your oral health. Talk to your dentist or physician about ways to build a healthy diet. ■

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