

Wellness: Dental health

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By Tamara Quintana

We all know that the foods we eat affect our overall health, but do you consider the health of your teeth when you make food choices?

According to the [American Dental Association](#), there is a growing concern among America's dentists that many of their patients are consuming record numbers of sugar-filled drinks and non-nutritious snack foods that can harm teeth.

When you eat these types of foods, and even some foods that are otherwise healthy for your body, the bacteria in your mouth come in contact with sugars and starches and produce acids. If left in the mouth, these acids attack the teeth and destroy the enamel, eventually resulting in tooth decay.

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Choosing the right foods at the right time

To protect your teeth, limit the amount of sugary and starchy foods you eat and the number of between meal snacks. Because the acids can remain in your mouth for 20 minutes or more, snacking throughout the day puts your teeth at greater risk.

Sugary snacks are not the only culprits when it comes to tooth decay. Even healthful foods like fruits, milk, bread, cereals and even some vegetables contain natural sugars and starches that can lead to tooth decay.

Of course you shouldn't stop eating these foods that are healthful for your body. You just need to be smarter about how and when you eat them. For example, when choosing fruit as a snack, firm, crunchy fruits like apples or pears and raw vegetables like carrots, celery or broccoli are a better choice.

Try to save foods like bread, soft fruits (bananas, raisins) and acidic fruits (oranges, lemons, tomatoes) to eat with a meal when the mouth is producing more saliva, which washes away some of the acids.

When you do snack, choose foods that are tooth-friendly like cheese, raw vegetables, nuts or plain yogurt. Choose water as your beverage between meals, and drink plenty of it.

Come clean

Most importantly, brush and floss regularly. Whatever you eat, the sooner you get food particles and the acid they produce out of your mouth, the better off your teeth will be. You should brush your teeth at least twice a day and preferably after every meal and snack. Flossing is also important for good dental health. You should floss at least once a day to dislodge any food particles stuck between the teeth.

Finally, visit your dentist regularly for check-ups and cleanings. With good choices and a little care, you can have the bright, healthy smile you want throughout your life.

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