

Food and Beverages for Healthy Teeth and Mouths



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Importance of Brushing & Flossing: Daily brushing and flossing is essential for minimizing the risks of developing dental caries (the disease that causes cavities in teeth) and periodontitis (gum disease). However, the foods and drinks we consume and their frequency throughout the day, also play a big role in preventing or contributing to these conditions. The germs found in the mouth feed on dietary sugars, which come from consuming any form of carbohydrates. These mouth germs, after ingesting the sugars and other carbohydrates we eat, then produce acids which eat away tooth structure, causing tooth decay (cavities).

Dietary Carbohydrates: Carbohydrates include dietary sugars, starches, fibers, and grains, as well as sugary beverages.

- Simple sugars found in food and drinks are readily available and can have the worst effects on teeth!
- Most carbohydrate sources should be kept to mealtimes to minimize the frequency of acid production from mouth germs.
- More complex carbohydrates like **whole grains and fibers** still contain sugars but they require lots of processing in the body to break down which makes them better in the diet than processed grains like white flour and granulated sugar.



What about the beverages and snacks you choose?

Beverages: Consuming drinks containing sugar and/or acids throughout the day like sipping on coffee, juices, soft drinks, or alcoholic beverages also leads to higher risk for dental issues. It is best to stick to water between meals; and if choosing drinks with high sugar or acid content, drink them during meals.

Fruit & Vegetable Snacks: When snacks are desired, whole crunchy fruits and vegetables are the best foods to choose!

- **Crunchy fruits** like apples have most of their sugar bound up in complex structures, so they won't cause as much acid production in the mouth as softer fruits. They also have high water content which will dilute the concentration of sugar.
- Many **vegetables** have little to no sugar, so the germs in the mouth won't use them to make acid.



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Other Great Snack Options:

- **Fats and protein-containing foods** have various health benefits and won't cause acid production in the mouth. This is also true with non-caloric foods and beverages containing sweeteners like **stevia and xylitol**.
- Even though dairy products contain lactose (a type of sugar), **cheese** is a good snack because the sugar doesn't break down in the mouth, but rather in the stomach.
- **Nuts and seeds**, especially cashews, almonds, and walnuts, contain vitamins, minerals and omega-3 fatty acids that promote healthy teeth and gums; plus, chewing nuts stimulates saliva production. Saliva aids in cleaning your teeth and gums, neutralizing acid production and helping to reharden tooth enamel and protecting against cavities.
- Whole-grain foods like **popcorn** are better snacks than chips, crackers, or candy.

Important Vitamins for Healthy Gums & Teeth: Calcium and Vitamin D are very important to include in the diet to keep teeth and gums healthy. Vitamin D helps calcium to be absorbed in the body and to deliver it to teeth and gums. Calcium is found in many foods but is especially high in dairy products, leafy green vegetables, nuts and seeds, oranges, some beans, and is added to other grains and cereals. Vitamin D is absorbed naturally from skin exposed to sunlight and is found in fish, egg yolks, and is supplemented in dairy or dairy alternative products, cereals, and grains.

Additional Suggestions for a Healthy Mouth & Healthy Snacking:

1. Intermittent snacking and sipping on sugary beverages will greatly increase your risks for dental cavities; so, choose vegetables and fruits, cheese, or popcorn and nuts instead.
2. Choose chewing gum, hard candies, and cough drops that are sugar-free.
3. Avoid routine use of soft drinks (sugar and diet sodas), and sports drinks.
4. After eating and drinking, brush your teeth! It's important to get into the habit of cleaning your mouth after eating and drinking sugar-containing foods and beverages.
5. When you can't brush, rinse your mouth thoroughly with water and consider Xylitol containing gum to help rid the mouth of sugars and stimulate saliva flow.

If you have any food/beverage allergies or sensitivities, avoid products containing those allergens.