

WHAT CAUSED MY CHILD'S CAVITY?

Tooth decay, also known as a cavity, is a hole in the tooth caused by acid breakdown of the tooth structure. This breakdown occurs primarily from plaque, the combination of the food we eat and bacteria that sticks to the teeth. Plaque often makes the teeth look yellow or fuzzy, but can be easily removed by brushing and flossing twice a day. The bacteria in plaque consume refined carbohydrates (fruit snacks, juice, cereal, crackers, fruit/veggie pouches, etc.) and produce acid that slowly etches away at the surface of the tooth until a hole/cavity is created.

HOW CAN I PREVENT CAVITIES?

Did you know that tooth decay is the the most common long-term childhood disease? There are many factors that influence your child's susceptibility to decay. Your child may have softer enamel or reduced saliva quantity or quality. There may even be a family history of susceptibility/genetic component to tooth decay. However, despite your child's susceptibility, tooth decay is **entirely preventable**. When we consider cavity prevention, we focus on what we can control which is **hygiene** and **diet**. Both are essential to staying cavity free.



HYGIENE

Effective brushing twice a day and flossing once a day is essential and helps control the plaque/bacterial component of tooth decay. *Effective* is the key word. We encourage parents to help with brushing until a child is 9-10 years old or able to demonstrate consistent, effective brushing and flossing habits. Once a child is able to show proper oral hygiene habits (most children are able to accomplish this by ages 6-7 years old), we encourage close supervision of the hygiene routine by the parents.

DIET AND NUTRITION: CAVITY CULPRITS

With regards to diet, focus on drinks and snacks. We encourage keeping the obvious cavity culprits out of the house (soda, candy, juice and fruit snacks) and enjoying only on special occasion. More common and less obvious cavity culprits are cereal, crackers, chips, dried fruit, bars and fruit/veggie pouches. Acidic drinks are a bigger problem than they have ever been and include flavored sugar free drinks (Crystal light, Mio, Propel, G2, Bubly, carbonated waters, flavored waters, etc). When enjoying refined carbohydrate snacks or acid rich drinks, it is worth following up with a rinse of water, a toothbrush or a piece of sugar free gum



Pictured above are a few examples of snacks to avoid or save for special occasions. Not pictured, but also worth mentioning are veggie straws and acidic drinks like sparkling/flavored waters or sports drinks, including sugar free.

DIET AND NUTRITION: THE "GOOD" STUFF

Ok, so you eliminated all the easy snacks in our household. What *can* my child eat?

Encourage fresh fruits and vegetables, cheese, yogurt, nuts, dried meats. Picky eaters may prefer more carbohydrate rich and processed foods. This is normal, but extra attention should be given to hygiene and frequent attempts should be made to reintroduce healthier snack options (ie rather than presenting raw fruits/veggies, present them with peanut butter, hummus or ranch; consider slicing the fruit or veggie differently; eat the healthy snacks with your child).

Depending on your child's age/size, they should be consuming one to two liters (5-10 8oz glasses) of water each day. Staying properly hydrated helps our bodies function properly, from our muscles to our salivary glands. There are many antibacterial and buffering (reducing acid) properties to our saliva, but in order to produce the appropriate amount at the right times, we need to be properly hydrated. Milk (whether it be cow's milk or fortified alternatives like soy or almond milk) is a good way for your child to increase their calcium intake to help with proper mineralization of teeth and bones. However, consumption should be limited to meal times because they have lots of natural sugars. Sticking to milk at mealtimes and water all other times is a great way to maintain healthy teeth.



Pictured above are a few healthy snack options. Other options not pictured could include mixed nuts, meat sticks, or peanut butter and ranch for dipping.

HEALTHY HABITS BY AGE

Good nutrition, brushing, flossing, and routine dental exams are at the core of building a strong foundation for your child's oral health. However, there are some important things to note about each stage of development that will be helpful as you continue to support healthy habits.

BIRTH to 1 year old

Prior to the first tooth, the mouth can be wiped out with a clean, wet rag after mealtimes.

AGES 1-2 years old

Once the first tooth erupts, begin brushing twice a day with a rice sized amount of toothpaste, parents always in control of the brushing. Once two teeth surfaces are touching, regular flossing can begin.

AGES 3-5 years old

This is a great age range to begin introducing an electric toothbrush. We would be happy to help guide your decision and answer any questions you may have when selecting an appropriate brush.

Parents can also begin introducing an oral mouth rinse. It is important to wait until your child has enough control to move the rinse around their mouth without swallowing the rinse.

Although a sense of independence emerges at this age, parents should remain in control of brushing or assist until at least the age of 8.

AGES 6+

Children are always evaluated for their growth and development and orthodontic needs, but at age 6+ children will begin to lose their first primary teeth which will provide a better idea of long-term dental needs.

If your child is participating in any sports at this age, it is a good time to introduce and begin wearing a sports mouth guard.