

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 7-8 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 alone, present them with peanut butter, hummus or ranch; consider slicing the fruit or veggie differently; eat the healthy snacks with your child). For drinks, 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.

X-RAYS

X-rays are an important tool to help us see what's happening inside your child's mouth—things we can't see just by looking. They allow us to check for cavities, monitor tooth development, and ensure the health of the bones and tissues that support the teeth.

- **Bitewing** – Show the upper and lower back teeth in a single view. Used to check for cavities in between the teeth, which are hard to detect with just a visual exam.
- **Panoramic** – A full-mouth x-ray that gives us a broad view of all the teeth, jaws, and surrounding structures. It's especially helpful for tracking growth and development, planning orthodontic treatment, & checking for missing, extra, or wisdom teeth.
- **Periapical** – Focus on one or two teeth at a time and show the entire tooth from crown to root. Useful for detecting problems under the gumline, like infections or trauma.
- **Occlusal** – These show the front baby teeth & are taken with the child biting down on the film. They show the floor or roof of the mouth and are helpful in seeing developing teeth that haven't yet come in.

Dental x-rays emit very low levels of radiation; and we take only the x-rays that are necessary for your child's health and development.

SEALANTS

Sealants are a protective coating applied to the chewing surfaces of the back teeth—typically the molars and premolars—where cavities are most likely to form. These areas have natural grooves and pits that can be hard to clean, even with regular brushing. Sealants act like a shield, made of a safe resin material that bonds to the tooth surface and blocks out food and bacteria. The process is quick, painless, and doesn't require drilling or numbing. They are typically tooth-colored or clear, so they blend in naturally with the teeth and are not noticeable when your child smiles or talks. Sealants can last for several years and are often applied soon after the permanent molars come in, usually around age 6 and then again at age 12, offering long-lasting protection with minimal maintenance.



FLUORIDE

Fluoride is a natural mineral that makes teeth stronger and more resistant to cavities. It works by: strengthening the tooth enamel (outer layer of the teeth), repairing early stages of tooth decay, disrupting harmful, cavity forming bacteria, and making teeth more resistant to acid attacks from plaque and sugars. Fluoride is present in public drinking water, and we also recommend for everyone to be using fluoridated toothpaste as well.

In addition to the fluoride your child may get from water or toothpaste, we recommend applying topical fluoride varnish to your child's teeth at least once a year. Fluoride varnish is a quick, safe, and painless treatment that we brush directly onto the teeth. It provides a high dose of fluoride in a form that stays on the teeth longer than toothpaste, giving added protection against cavities. This is especially important for children, as their teeth are still developing and are more vulnerable to cavities.

While fluoride varnish is a powerful tool in preventing tooth decay, it doesn't replace daily brushing and flossing. It simply adds an extra layer of defense. For children at higher risk of cavities, more frequent applications—such as every six months—may be recommended. Overall, fluoride varnish is a safe, effective, and affordable way to help keep your child's smile healthy and strong.