



Eat for a Beautiful Smile

You brush, you floss, you see your dentist, but do you eat with your oral health in mind? Some surprising, even healthy foods can cause cavities, while others can help protect you from decay, gum disease, and even bad breath. Here, how to tailor your diet for optimal dental health, dental care, and healthy teeth.

Eat carbs at mealtimes

A handful of potato chips or even a whole wheat roll can be just as damaging to your teeth and gums as a chocolate chip cookie. All carbohydrates break down into simple sugars, which are ultimately converted by bacteria in the mouth into plaque, a sticky residue that is the primary cause of gum disease and cavities. Carb-based foods such as breads and crackers tend to have "a chewy, adhesive texture," making it easier for them to get caught between teeth or under the gum line, where bacteria can then accumulate. Have carbs at mealtimes rather than as a snack. When you eat a larger amount of food, you produce more saliva, which helps wash food particles away.

Drink tea

Black and green teas contain polyphenols, antioxidant plant compounds that prevent plaque from adhering to your teeth and help reduce your chances of developing cavities and gum disease. Tea also has potential for reducing bad breath because it inhibits the growth of the bacteria that cause the odor. Many teas also contain fluoride, from the leaves and the water it's steeped in, which helps protect tooth enamel from decay and promotes healthy teeth.

Sip with a straw

Most sodas, sports drinks, and juices contain acids, such as citric and phosphoric, that can erode dental enamel, even if they're diet or sugar-free versions. Sipping acidic drinks through a straw positioned toward the back of your mouth limits their contact with your teeth and helps preserve the enamel.

Increase your C intake

Vitamin C is the cement that holds all of your cells together, so just as it's vital for your skin, it's important for the health of your gum tissue. People who consume less than 60 mg per day of C (8 ounces of orange juice or one orange contains more than 80 mg) are 25% more likely to have gum disease than people who take in 180 mg or more.

Eat 800 mg of calcium a day

People who do are less likely to develop severe gum disease. The reason: About 99% of the calcium in your body is in your bones and teeth. Dietary calcium, available in foods like cheese, milk, and yogurt, strengthens the alveolar bone in the jaw, which helps hold your teeth in place. The recommended amount is 1,000 mg per day for women younger than 50 and 1,200 mg for those older.

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