

Healthy Eating to Promote Strong Teeth in Children



Nature's Toothbrush

The foods children eat directly affect the status of their dental health long term. One of the best things a parent can do for their kids' teeth, outside of promoting proper oral hygiene habits, is teaching them to make nutritional and health advancing dietary choices. Foods that are high in carbohydrates, starches, and sugars can cause dental decay and have a negative impact on dental health when consumed in immoderate amounts or when left on the teeth too long after eating. Fostering a healthy and well balanced diet for children from an early age helps form habits that result in a lifetime of strong teeth and overall better health.

Making Nutritional Choices For Healthy Teeth and Gums

In addition to brushing their teeth twice a day and flossing once daily, kids should consume a well-balanced and nutritional diet, to not only promote overall health but also help build a strong healthy smile.

Some tips for helping kids make nutritional choices to keep their teeth healthier and cleaner:

- **Lean meats, nuts, and proteins**—These are a good source of protein for children and help strengthen tooth enamel. Consider turkey, chicken, and white fish as good examples of lean meats. Nuts are a great healthy snack and a quick source of energy for kids. Low sugar peanut butters are good snack options as well.



- **Fruits and vegetables**—Fruits and veggies are a good snack alternative to foods rich in carbohydrates. Fruits and vegetables with high water content like melons, pears, celery, and cucumbers are especially good for dental hygiene and actually help clean the teeth. Eating crunchy, raw fruits and vegetables every day helps remove some substances that

adhere to the surface of the teeth when eating, as well as promote overall health.

- **Cheese and low-fat dairy products**—Aged cheeses like cheddar, swiss, and monterey jack help generate the flow of saliva, which aids in removing food particles from the teeth. Offer these as a snack or as part of a child’s lunch. Low-fat dairy products like skim milk and yogurt can also promote oral health.
- Unsweetened foods—Buying unsweetened foods helps decrease the amount of sugar to potentially cause decay in your child’s mouth.
- **Calcium Sources**—Strong sources of calcium are crucial to your child’s bones and for building strong teeth. Low-fat milks, cheese, yogurt, and broccoli are good sources of calcium.
- **Water instead of sugary juices or soda**—Sodas, juices, and even milk can contain large amounts of sugar that can cause dental decay. Limit the amount of sugary drinks a child consumes and get your child in the habit of primarily drinking water. Water in general helps wash the teeth. Also, never put a baby to bed with a bottle of milk or juice!
- **Xylitol-sweetened or sugar free gum**—If your child chews gum make sure it is sugar free or sweetened with Xylitol. Xylitol actually decreases bacteria in the mouth, and the action of chewing supports saliva flow, which helps wash away food particles from the teeth.

Foods To Limit Or Avoid

Lessen the risk of dental caries (cavities) and oral decay by limiting your child’s intake of certain foods or avoiding them all together:

- **Sticky, chewy foods**—Sugary foods like gummy worms, caramel, lollipops, hard candies, linger on the teeth. In large amounts or without proper teeth brushing, these sweet foods can cause cavities and lead to serious tooth decay. When giving your child sweets, it is best to give them directly after a meal rather than as a snack. After a meal, there is typically a larger amount of saliva still left in the mouth, making it easier to clean away food and sugar particles from the teeth. Make

sure children brush the residue of their teeth after eating these types of foods.

- **Desserts**—Limit the amount of desserts your child consumes. Ice cream, cookies, and other treats are fine when given in moderation, but it is best to make sure children brush the residue of their teeth after consuming such treats.
- **Sugar sweetened drinks and juices**—Drinks like sodas, sports drinks, sweetened fruit juices, and chocolate milk should all be given to children in moderate and limited amounts. Children should primarily drink water and it is best to limit a child's sugary beverage intake to one a day or less.
- **Limit snacking**—It is best for children to be in the routine of snacking as little as possible in between meals. When a child is constantly eating without brushing or rinsing afterwards, it is more difficult for the mouth to generate enough saliva to sufficiently wash away food and sugar particles from the teeth. Time gap between meals gives the mouth a chance to keep itself as clean as possible. Frequent snacking supplies a continual fuel to help bacteria grow, which causes plaque formation and tooth decay.