

Keeping Your Teeth Healthy As You Age



Taking care of your teeth is crucial for preventing teeth and gum problems such as dental cavities (holes in the teeth), receding gums, and tooth loss. However, as you age, you may start to have problems with your teeth due to:

- Lack of care for your teeth which leads to loss of underlying supporting bone. This causes your teeth to be loose, shaky, and painful to bite on.
- Brushing too hard which leads to receding gums.
- Dry mouth which causes food to stay longer in the mouth, leading to decay.

When we eat, **bacteria in the mouth breaks down food to produce acid which attacks the teeth**. Over time, this acid can cause damage to the teeth resulting in cavities, infection, and pain.

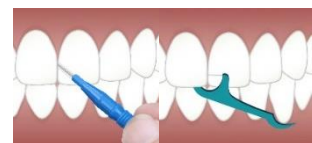
What increases the risk of dental cavities



1. **Sugary food and drinks** such as candy and soft drinks are broken down easily by bacteria in the mouth. This produces a lot of acid which removes minerals such as calcium from your teeth and eventually leads to dental cavities.
2. **Sticky food** such as caramel stays on your teeth for a longer time. This allows more time for bacteria to produce acid.
3. **Acidic food and drinks** such as juices, soft drinks, vinegar contain high levels of acid which can directly erode teeth over time.
4. **Taking a long time** to finish your food or drink exposes your teeth to acid for a longer time, increasing the risk for dental cavities.

Tips to prevent dental cavities

- Rinse your mouth and dentures thoroughly after every meal to remove food particles and reduce acid build-up.
- Use dental floss or interdental brush to remove stubborn food particles between your teeth.
- Keep your teeth clean by brushing every morning and night, and flossing nightly.
- Use toothpaste with fluoride concentration of at least 1,000ppm.
- Clean your dentures every night.
- Do not wear dentures to sleep.



Common questions and answers



Q Malnourished/underweight individuals are often encouraged to have nutritional beverages and desserts to aid in weight gain. What can they do to reduce the risk of tooth decay?

A: It is better for them to eat their meals and desserts in one sitting as it takes at least 20 minutes for the acid to clear from the mouth. If they are unable to finish their meals at one sitting, it is important to space out the meals and snacks so that their teeth are not constantly exposed to acid.

Q Is it okay to sip nutritional beverages slowly over a few hours?

A: No. The same beverage sipped slowly over a few hours keeps the mouth in a constant acidic state throughout the few hours. This increases the risk of tooth decay.

Q Are there any healthy snacks that can reduce tooth decay?

A: If you need to snack, it is better to take snacks such as cheese, fresh fruits and vegetables, nuts, and plain yoghurt. These snacks are lower in sugar and acid.

Q How can I maintain good nutrition when I find it is hard to eat/bite?

A: Practical tips for those with tooth problems:

- Prepare soft and easy-to-eat staples such as soft rice, porridge or kway teow. **Don't forget to add vegetables and protein to make sure you are getting all the nutrients your body needs.**
- Choose soft fruit such as banana, papaya, watermelon, berries, and kiwi.
- Cut vegetables into smaller pieces and cook them well or till soft.
- Replace tough meats with fish, tofu, eggs, minced chicken or minced lean meat.



Please see a dietitian if you need help with your diet.



Please see a dentist if you have difficulty biting.



The information in this brochure is meant for educational purposes and should not be used as a substitute for medical diagnosis or treatment. Please seek your doctor's advice before starting any treatment, or if you have any questions related to your health, physical fitness or medical condition.

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