

# Healthy Snacks for Healthy Teeth

Tooth decay (cavities) can be caused by sweet and acidic foods. Plaque bacteria in the mouth change sweet food into acid, this causes tooth decay. It is very important to reduce the number of times a day that decay producing food or drink is taken. Children need to have gaps between meals, so they only eat three to five times a day. This reduces the amount of acid in the mouth. Drinks of water and milk are encouraged between meals because they reduce acid on the teeth.

## What food and drinks damage teeth?

Foods that are acidic, sticky and sweet can damage teeth. Examples are:

- Juice
- Cordial
- Flavoured Milk (Milo, Quik, Big M)
- Ribena
- Sports Drinks
- Soft Drinks (including sugar free)
- Sweetened cereals (such as Nutri-grain and Coco Pops)
- Dried Fruit (like Sultanas & Apricots)
- Dried Fruit Bars (Rollups), Muesli Bars
- Honey
- Jam
- Nutella
- Sweet Biscuits
- Cake
- Lollies – including Natural Snakes

Having these drinks or food between meals, or at school, can cause cavities.

Eating fruit often between meals can damage teeth, as fruit is sweet and acidic and can contribute towards tooth erosion (tooth surface loss). When children eat fruit between meals, we suggest that they follow up with a small square of cheese, or a drink of milk or water. This washes out the acid from the mouth. Children who like to eat an apple before bedtime **MUST** brush their teeth afterwards.

## ✓ What snacks are tooth friendly?

- Dry biscuits (crackers)
- Sliced ham, salmon or turkey
- Popcorn
- Plain rice cakes
- Cut-up vegetables with dips such as tzatziki or hummus
- Nuts
- Cheese slices
- Sushi
- Peanut butter, Vegemite and butter

For a healthy, balanced diet, children need **three pieces of fruit and five vegetables a day**, a high intake of grains (e.g. wholegrain bread and cereal), and protein (e.g. meat, fish etc.) and three intakes of dairy products (e.g. plain milk, cheese and natural yoghurt).

## How often should children brush their teeth?

Brushing should be done twice a day:

- After breakfast
- Before going to bed at night (this is a good time to floss as well, from a very early age)

Until 7 years of age, children should be helped to clean their teeth with a toothbrush and toothpaste (a pea-size ball of low fluoride toothpaste for children under 7 years of age), and then have nothing to eat or drink other than water at night. The toothpaste should be spat out without rinsing. The dentist may advise a fluoride mouth rinse for children wearing braces.

## Helpful hints:

- ✓ Rather than having lollies in the house, buy a treat for your child once a week (like a plain chocolate Freddo Frog, an icy-pole or an ice cream that is not sticky and goes through the mouth quickly). Artificial and natural Jelly snakes, Roll-ups, Chupa-chups and Minties cause tooth decay because they are sticky and stay in the mouth for a long time. They also damage braces, crowns etc.
- ✓ Do grocery shopping without the children and buy savoury items not sweet.
- ✓ The best cereals according to the Australian Institute of Sport are Weet-bix and Vita Brits. The cereals which cause the most damage to your teeth are Nutri-grain and Coco Pops.
- ✓ At parties, children should eat the lollies all at once instead of saving them for later. If unable to brush immediately, chewing sugar free gum for 10 minutes is a good alternative. This type of gum stimulates saliva flow that washes out the mouth.
- ✓ If making lolly bags for parties, include sugar free chewing gum, non-sticky foods and novelty items.
- ✓ Sweet drinks are less damaging if taken through a straw. This keeps the drink off the teeth. Drinking it all in one go is better than sipping for a long time. This reduces the time of sweet exposure. Flavoured sip-a-straws cause cavities.

Remember that it is the **number of times** that the teeth are exposed to sweet, sticky and acid things that is important, **not the amount consumed**.

## Where can I find more information?

For more information, visit: [goforyourlife.vic.gov.au](http://goforyourlife.vic.gov.au)