

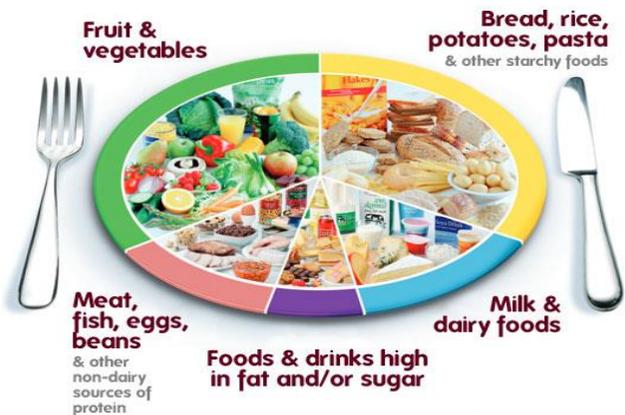
# Diet and your teeth

## Why is a healthy diet important for a healthy mouth?

Every time you eat or drink anything sugary, your teeth are under acid attack for up to one hour. This is because the sugar will react with the bacteria in plaque (the sticky coating on your teeth) and produce harmful acids. So it is important to cut down on how often you have sugary foods, which will limit the amount of time your teeth are at risk.

Acidic foods and drinks can be just as harmful to your teeth. The acid wears away the enamel, and will leave the dentine uncovered. This is called 'dental erosion', and makes your teeth sensitive and less attractive.

A diet that is rich in vitamins, minerals, fresh fruit and vegetables can help to prevent gum disease. Gum disease can lead to tooth loss and cause bad breath. Use the eat well plate to show you what you should eat as part of a healthy and balanced diet.



## What is tooth decay?

Tooth decay damages your teeth and leads to fillings or even extractions. Decay happens when sugar reacts with the bacteria in plaque. This forms the acids that attack the teeth and destroy the enamel. When this happens, the tooth enamel may break down forming a hole or 'cavity' in to the dentine. The tooth can then decay more quickly.

## What foods can cause decay?

All sugars can cause decay. Sugar can come in many forms, for example: sucrose, fructose, maltose and glucose. These sugars can all damage your teeth.

Many processed foods have sugars in them, and the higher up it appears in the list of ingredients, the more sugar there is in the product. Always read the list of ingredients when you are food shopping.

When you are reading the labels remember that 'no added sugar' does not necessarily mean that the product is sugar free. It simply means that no extra sugar has been added by them to the food. The products may instead contain sugars like the one's listed above, or could be listed as 'carbohydrates'.

## How do acidic foods and drinks affect my teeth?

Some foods and drinks are more acidic than others, and some are acidic enough to attack your teeth directly. The acidity of a product is measured by its PH value. The PH values of some foods have been listed. the lower the PH value the more acidic the product, the higher the PH value the less acidic the food product is. Alkaline's that have a high PH value and can cancel out the effects of acid.



## Can I eat snacks?

It is better for your teeth and general health if you eat 3 meals a day plus no more than two snacks, instead of having lots of snack attacks. If you do need to snack between meals, choose foods that do not contain sugar. Fruit does contain acids, which can attack your teeth. However, this is only damaging to your teeth if you eat an unusually large amount. Try to limit dried fruit as it is high in sugar and can stick to your teeth.

Savoury snacks are better for you, such as:

- raw vegetables
- nuts
- cheese



Try to cut down on sugary sweets and drinks to help reduce tooth decay.

## What should I drink?

Still water and milk are good choices. It is better for your teeth if you drink fruit juices just at meal times. If you are drinking them between meals, try diluting them with water. Drinking through a straw can help the drink go straight to the back of your mouth without touching your teeth.

Diluted sugar free squashes are the safest alternative to water and milk, always make sure you dilute the squash 1 part squash 10 parts water.



Fizzy drinks can increase the risk of dental problems. If they contain sugar this can cause decay and the acid in both normal and diet drinks can dissolve the enamel of your teeth. The risk is higher when you have these drinks between meals.

### Should I brush my teeth after every meal?

It is important that you brush for 2 minutes twice a day with toothpaste containing fluoride. You should always brush your teeth before breakfast and before you go to bed at night,

Eating and drinking naturally weakens the enamel on your teeth, and brushing straight afterwards can cause tiny particles of enamel to be brushed away. It is best not to brush your teeth until at least 1 hour after eating.

### Can I have teeth which attach to the jawbone?

Yes, by having implants. The success of this technique means you may be able to replace missing teeth without crowning other teeth. See our 'Tell me about' leaflet *Implants* for more details.

Remember that it is as important to care for your remaining teeth as it is to replace the missing ones.



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- Implants



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Oral Answers



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