

Nutrition News & Notes



Oral Health And Nutrition: What And How To Eat For Healthy Teeth

(NAPSA)—It may come as a surprise to some but an apple a day can keep the *dentist* away—if you munch quickly. Researchers at Tufts University School of Dental Medicine in Boston say how you eat, rather than what you eat, affects oral health most.

For example, slowly sipping soda or juice all day could be worse than eating a candy bar, because the longer sugar stays in contact with teeth, the greater the risk for dental caries.

Tooth decay starts when bacteria, which live in plaque on teeth, feed off the carbohydrates in food and produce acid in the mouth, which erodes the tooth enamel and causes dental caries.

Foods high in carbohydrates (baked goods and candy) or acid (soda, citrus fruits and fruit juices) present the greatest risk to dental health. There are a number of low-acid nutrients that reduce the risk of a particular food; such as protein, fat, phosphorous, and calcium. These low-acid nutrients prevent acid build-up in the mouth, resulting in less tooth decay. Foods such as milk and nuts are “low-risk” foods, not only because they are low in sugar and high in protein, calcium and phosphorous, but because of their non-sticky texture.

“Munch on snacks that are less tooth decay-promoting like low-fat cheeses, raw vegetables, crunchy fruits, popcorn, nuts, and arti-



Sticky foods may be a tooth's worst enemy.

cially-sweetened beverages,” suggests Carole A. Palmer, Ed.D., R.D., associate professor and co-chair of Nutrition and Preventive Dentistry at Tufts University School of Dental Medicine.

Tufts Dental School experts offer this advice:

1. Cut down on snacks. Although eating a very sugary meal is not considered healthful, eating sugary foods rapidly and infrequently may curtail the production of caries. “Keep [carbohydrate-dense] foods in contact with your teeth as little as possible,” advises Palmer. Tufts experts recommend eating as few snacks between meals as possible, and if you must drink sugar-laden beverages, do so with meals—

rather than sipping them slowly throughout the day.

2. Replace sugary foods with fruits, vegetables and high-protein snacks. Foods high in sugar, such as cakes, cookies, and candy, tend to promote tooth decay more than those that are not only lower in sugar, as are fruits and vegetables, but are also high in water and fiber, which lessen the effects of sugar on teeth. Furthermore, unlike carbohydrates, foods high in protein and fat (milk, nuts, cheese) do not cause tooth decay.

3. Avoid sticky food. Eating sticky foods puts teeth at a greater risk for dental caries because the food is in contact with the teeth longer. Although grapes and raisins are both healthful fruits, raisins are more harmful to teeth than their fresh fruit counterparts, because they are stickier and can sneak into tooth crevices.

4. Enjoy high-protein appetizers. The experts suggest eating particular foods before or after a meal or snack could minimize the effect carbohydrates have on acid production in the mouth. For example, eating low-fat cheese (a high protein and calcium food) before sweets limits this chemical change.

Although these dental health findings do not change whether “an apple a day keeps the doctor away,” they should affect the way people eat apples.