

How can I reduce the risk of tooth decay?

With such a vast array of food and drinks containing sugar it is unrealistic to eliminate sugar completely from your everyday diet. It is therefore important to focus on reducing and controlling the way in which sugar is consumed. The following diet advice will help you reduce your risk of tooth decay. This applies to food and drink for yourself and all your family.

1. Replacing sugary foods with healthier foods.

Reducing the amount of sugary foods being eaten is important in reducing the risk of tooth decay. Ideally sugary foods, such as cakes, chocolates and sweets should be kept for a weekly treat. If cakes and sweets are eaten on a daily basis this is classed as a high sugar diet and thus is a higher chance of developing tooth decay.

Replacing sugary foods with healthier ones, such as fruit, is essential for healthy teeth as well as your body's general health. If sugary foods and drinks are in the kitchen cupboard there will always be the temptation to snack on these foods. The best idea is not to buy these foods as part of your weekly shop, instead buy fruit and vegetables.

2. Reduce the amount of times per day you have sugary foods.

The frequency (i.e. how often sugary food or drinks are being eaten during the day) is the most important factor in assessing the risk of tooth decay. The more often sugary things are being eaten or drunk in a day, the more likely it is that your teeth will decay. Avoid snacking on sugary foods, especially between meals.

3. Restrict sugary foods to meal times.

During meal times your body produces more saliva. Saliva neutralises the harmful effect which sugar has been on your teeth. Thus, the risk of tooth decay will be reduced if sugar is eaten at meal times and not between meals.

4. Avoid sugary snacks/drinks at bedtime.

When you are sleeping your mouth becomes very dry as your saliva flow is reduced. When your mouth is dry the risk of tooth decay is increased. Therefore sugary foods at bedtime, after brushing your teeth will increase your risk of tooth decay.

5. Chewing gum between and after meals.

Sugar free chewing gum is very good for teeth as it helps the body produce more saliva. Saliva neutralises the harmful effects sugar has on the teeth. Thus, by stimulating this extra flow chewing gum helps reduce the risk of developing tooth decay.

6. Be aware of what you are drinking.

The majority of people are aware that cakes, chocolate and sweets are bad for your teeth. However, there is a lot of confusion about which drinks will cause damage to your teeth. Although diet fizzy drinks and low sugar diluting juices are low in sugar, they are very acidic and will also damage your teeth.

There are only four drinks good for your teeth;

1. Plain milk (not milkshakes)
2. Plain water (not fizzy or flavoured water)
3. Tea (with no sugar or sweeteners)
4. Coffee (with no sugar or sweeteners)

All other drinks, despite of what it says on the label will damage your teeth.