

HEALTHY DIET FOR CHILDREN

A healthy and balanced diet is essential for good growth and development. Most nutritional advice suggest that children need a daily intake of grains (e.g. wholegrain bread) and protein (e.g. meat or fish), plus three pieces of fruit, five servings of vegetables, and three serves of dairy products.

HOW DOES FOOD CAUSE DECAY?

There are always bacteria on teeth and in the mouth that convert carbohydrates and sugars into acid, which then dissolves tooth enamel, thereby causing decay and cavities.

It is also important to minimise the time food (and acid) is in the mouth. Ideally, food and drink should be consumed three to five times a day. Constant "grazing" on food and snacks keeps a steady supply of carbohydrates and sugars in the mouth for the bacteria to produce acid, and prolongs the time tooth enamel is exposed to acid and is susceptible to decay.

Choosing the appropriate food and drinks for children, especially their choice of snacks between meals, can reduce the incidence of decay and prevent damage to orthodontic appliances.

WHICH FOOD & DRINKS CAN CAUSE DAMAGE TO TEETH?

- Carbonated, fizzy, soft drinks
- "Sports drinks"
- Juice and cordial
- Flavoured milk
- Sweet biscuits and lollies
- Sweetened breakfast cereals
- Confectionery bars

WHICH SNACKS ARE TOOTH-FRIENDLY?

As citrus fruits contain sugars and acid, it is best to follow them with a drink of water or milk to wash away excess acid from the mouth. Hard sticky foods and snacks such as Minties or toffees can damage braces. Other habits children need to avoid is crushing ice cubes with teeth.

- Water or plain milk
- Water crackers or rice cakes
- Sliced meats (ham, salmon, turkey) or cheese
- Julienne vegetables with dips (tzatziki, hummus, or babaganoush)
- Sushi

HOW OFTEN SHOULD CHILDREN BRUSH THEIR TEETH?

Tooth brushing should be done thoroughly three times a day (in the morning, before going to bed, and after lunch). Children with braces are encouraged to brush after each meal and snack to remove traces of food from around their braces.

Children younger than seven years old should be supervised during tooth brushing. Only a small amount of tooth paste is required (about the size of a small pea). Young children should also refrain from swallowing large amounts of tooth paste. After tooth brushing at night, children should not eat or drink anything except for plain water.

Orthodontists or dentists may recommend fluoride mouth rinses for children with braces.

HELPFUL HINTS

- The amount of sweet, sticky and acidic things consumed is important
- The number of times teeth are exposed to sweet, sticky and acidic things is also important
- Sweet drinks are less damaging if consumed with a straw. It helps keep the drink off the teeth
- It is also better to drink sweet, acidic drinks in one go, rather than constantly sipping over long periods of time
- Avoid sweetened cereals, and sticky confectionery
- Sugar-free chewing gum can help stimulate salivary flow and dilute acid or sugars in the mouth