

# Dental Cavities Can be Prevented, Naturally

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Careful, daily brushing and flossing are both considered important factors in preventing tooth decay. Another factor in dental health that is seldom considered is the avoiding of sugar and processed foods.

According to a 2001 report, entitled, **Oral health in America: report of the Surgeon General. Rockville, Maryland: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**, dental caries is one of the most common chronic disease of childhood.

Several years ago, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) sponsored a screening of third grade children in a New Hampshire public school. They found that 52.0% had a history of dental caries, 21.7% had untreated tooth decay, and 45.9% had a dental sealant on at least one permanent molar.

Data in this study were tabulated according to the percentage of children with dental caries experience, untreated decay, presence of sealants on permanent molars, and urgency of care. The need for early dental care was defined as having untreated dental caries without accompanying signs or symptoms, the presence of spontaneous bleeding of the gum, or suspicious white or red soft tissue areas. Among children screened, 69.8% had no obvious dental problems, 25.1% required early care, and 5.1% required urgent care. Urgent need for dental care included signs or symptoms consistent with pain, infection, swelling, or soft tissue ulceration of 2 weeks duration

Despite improvements in oral health in the United States, by late adolescence approximately 80% of children have a history of caries. Dental caries is the technical name for cavities. Cavities are caused by bacteria called *Streptococcus mutans*. This bacterium lives in the mouth and grows from sugar and other carbohydrates. When carbohydrates are present in the mouth, an acid is produced that dissolve the enamel of teeth. This is what causes tooth decay.

Another major reason for the problems in children's dental health is that

they consume large amounts of soda. As long ago as the early 1970s, in a study conducted between involving 3,200 Americans between the ages of 9 and 29, a direct connection was established between soda and tooth decay. Subsequent studies have conclusively shown that children who consume soda are at a higher risk for cavities. The evidence about soda shows that sugar is not the only culprit in tooth decay, however. Soda contains acids that have been shown to dissolve tooth enamel and weakens teeth to the point where they are more prone to decay. Fluoride has proven ineffective for preventing tooth decay.

There are other lifestyle choices that make dental health poorer than necessary. While lack of brushing and flossing and diet are the main reasons for tooth loss and decay in adults, studies have shown that smoking causes both tooth decay and tooth loss because it blocks blood flow to the gums. An apparent resurgence in teen-age smoking does not bode well for near-term dental health in this demographic group.

There are also mounting concerns about the safety of consuming fluoride, classified by the EPA as a toxin. (For more up-to-date information on the dangers of fluoride, go to the **Featured Health Articles** in this website, entitled **Why is Fluoride in Your Drinking Water?**) For this reason, many people are choosing to fight tooth decay naturally, without fluoride. Here are some guidelines for fighting tooth decay the natural way.

1. Brush and floss a minimum of two times per day. It is especially important to brush after eating sweet foods.
2. Brush with a toothpaste that contains casein, natural mint extract, and Xylitol, and not fluoride.
3. Consume large amounts of calcium-rich foods. Stay away from all refined sugars. Drink adequate amounts of water and eliminate fruit juice and sodas.
4. Drink green and black tea. Frequent consumption of green or black tea reduces plaque buildup and also suppresses bacteria levels in the mouth. Do not add sweeteners, milk, or cream to the tea.
5. Keep your toothbrush clean. The bacteria that are the main cause of cavities can grow on a toothbrush. A few times a week, disinfect your

toothbrush by boiling it in saltwater for about a minute. Toothbrushes should be replaced frequently.

Do these things (and teach your children to do them) and there will be need for far fewer dentists in the years ahead.