



Share the Wellness Tip

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Choosing the Best Foods for Healthy Mouths

Children's Dental Health Month is a time to raise awareness about the importance of oral health. Developing good habits at an early age and scheduling regular dental visits helps children get a good start on a lifetime of healthy teeth and gums. And of course, caring for your mouth is as important as caring for the rest of your body. Cleaning teeth and gums removes plaque and plaque contains the harmful bacteria that can cause tooth decay. But beyond cleaning, the foods you eat and beverages you drink can damage your teeth.

A healthy mouth does more for you than you might imagine. Your mouth lets you speak clearly, express your emotions, and eat a healthy diet by thoroughly chewing and tasting the foods you enjoy. But tooth decay or gum disease can take a bite out of these abilities. Tooth decay remains one of the most common diseases of childhood, with a quarter of 2 to 5 year-olds and half of kids 12 to 15 years old having one or more cavities. Brush up on how the food and drink you put into your mouth can protect it so that you can keep smiling.

The Bad Guys—These foods and drinks increase your risk of tooth decay:

- **Soda.** Carbonated soft drinks can erode tooth enamel, leading to decay. Sipping a soda for hours is worse than having a beverage with a meal because it increases the time the beverage stays in contact with teeth.
- **Sugary snacks.** Cake, cookies, assorted candies, and other treats high in sugar harm tooth enamel.
- **Sticky and chewy snacks.** Taffy, gummy bears, raisins, and other dried fruits are a common cause of decay because they can easily get stuck between teeth and aren't likely to be cleared away by saliva.
- **Sour candies.** The high acid levels contained in these sweets break down tooth enamel, making it easier for decay to take hold.

The Not-So-Bad Guys—When you crave a sweet, these treats are likely to do less damage to your teeth than the bad guys:

- **Sugar-free candies and lollipops.** These candies have two advantages. They don't contain decay-causing sugar, and they help stimulate saliva which cleanses the teeth and decreases the risk for cavities.
- **Sugar-free gum.** This kind of gum can help prevent cavities by removing food bits caught between teeth and increasing saliva.

The Good Guys - The following food and beverages support dental health:

- **Fresh green tea.** This antioxidant-rich drink can reduce cavity risk because it offers polyphenols that help keep plaque from sticking to your teeth. To keep it healthy, brew it fresh from bags and don't add much sugar.
- **Milk and plain yogurt.** These calcium-rich choices help maintain the health of your teeth. They're also low in acid.
- **Fruits rich in vitamin C.** Oranges, grapefruit, strawberries, kiwis, and other fruits high in vitamin C help keep gum tissue healthy and strong.
- **Vegetables.** Crunchy vegetables such as celery and carrots clean and stimulate your gums. Pumpkins, sweet potatoes, and broccoli, which are high in vitamin A, help form and maintain tooth enamel. Onions contain sulfur compounds that can kill bacteria in the mouth, helping to combat decay.

For more information, resources and activities on children's dental health visit the [American Dental Association](#).

