

## Nutrition and Oral Health

**W**hat we eat is significant to our overall health. General guidelines should include balance and moderation, and should involve choices from the five major food groups.

- Dairy (milk, yogurt, cheese)
- Meat (beef, poultry, fish, etc.)
- Fruits
- Vegetables
- Whole grains (breads, cereals)

*Depending on your lifestyle, vitamin and mineral supplements may be necessary.*

### How Sugary Foods Affect Your Oral Health

A major cause of cavities (tooth decay) is the breakdown of refined sugars by bacteria, turning the sugars to acid, which then dissolves the tooth enamel. That's why plaque (a sticky mixture of bacteria, food, and debris) removal is so important. Studies have shown that the nature and frequency of sugar intake is more important than the amount. If the sugary food is very sticky, like caramel, gummy bears, or jam, it will remain on the teeth for a longer period of time. If you or your children are constantly snacking on sugary foods or sipping soda, you should be aware that your teeth are under continuous acid attack.

### How You Can Help Prevent Tooth Decay

- Avoid having sugar in the mouth for long periods of time.
- Stay away from sucking candies and chewing gum containing sugar, and refrain from drinking soft drinks regularly (unless sugar-free).
- Try to cut down on the number of snacks per day.
- If snacking is necessary, substitute foods that don't promote tooth decay. Examples are popcorn, pretzels, fruits, nuts, cheese, and vegetables.

- If you must consume sugary foods, do so with a meal or for dessert. Increased saliva flow during meals helps to wash the food away. Also, many people brush their teeth after meals. It's better to eat sweets at a time and place that allows you to brush teeth soon afterward.

### How Vitamins and Minerals Benefit Oral Health

A balanced diet is also important to keep bones and gums healthy. Foods rich in vitamin C (citrus fruits and juices), vitamin B12 (dairy, meat) and folic acid (spinach, broccoli) help strengthen gums and supporting soft tissue. Of course, calcium from dairy foods and dark green leafy vegetables are important too, as they are necessary for developing and maintaining strong teeth and bones.

For those who are lactose intolerant, calcium supplements are readily available.

