

Take Action in These 3 Areas to Help Prevent Tooth Decay

Dental caries, more commonly known as tooth decay, is the world's most common disease, transcending national boundaries, continents, ethnicity and social class. Along with gum disease, it's a top cause for lost teeth.

Tooth decay can be treated effectively when caught early, but it may still inflict a heavy cost on finances and lost work, school or personal time. The better strategy is to stop decay before it starts by addressing your own individual risk factors for the disease. Although some are genetic in nature, many of these factors arise from habits and behaviors that we can change.

Here, then, are 3 such factors that could play a significant role in whether or not you'll avoid this damaging disease.

Saliva. Tooth decay actually begins with acid that we encounter while eating and from the bacteria inhabiting our mouths. High levels of oral acid can soften and erode tooth enamel, which in turn makes the tooth vulnerable to decay. Saliva, however, can neutralize acid and lower the mouth's overall acidity. Situations like smoking, a metabolic disease or side effects from medication can inhibit your ability to produce acid and make tooth decay more likely. Improving saliva flow could lower your risk.

Plaque. The aforementioned bacteria thrive within a thin biofilm called plaque that adheres to tooth surfaces. Plaque accumulation fuels bacterial multiplication and their production of harmful acid. Although some people have a genetic propensity for bacterial growth, plaque represents the more common cause, especially through poor or non-existent oral hygiene practices. Brushing and flossing daily removes the majority of plaque and improve your chances for preventing decay.

Sugar. The average person consumes around 23 teaspoons of sugar every day, mainly from processed foods and beverages. Oral bacteria feed on sugar, so an overabundance in the mouth supports their growth. The situation worsens when a person constantly snacks or sips on sugar-filled items, which interferes with saliva attempting to neutralize acid. By reducing your sugar intake and limiting it to just mealtimes, you can help promote healthier teeth and gums.



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