

WHAT CAUSES CAVITIES?

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"How do I keep my kids from getting cavities?" is one of the most frequently asked questions I hear from the mothers of my patients. As parents, we want to do whatever we can to help keep our children cavity-free, and here are some of the best tips on what we can do. To understand how to prevent cavities, it's helpful to look at what causes cavities. Think of the process that causes cavities as links in the chain. We want to break these links to protect against cavities. Remember the mantra, "Break the Chain!"



YOU NEED THREE THINGS TO GET A CAVITY

- 1 A TOOTH
- 2 BAD BACTERIA
- 3 A FOOD SOURCE FOR THAT BACTERIA

Every time we eat or drink a carbohydrate, including regular carbs like: bread, cereal, pasta, crackers, as well as the obviously unhealthy stuff like: candy, soda, and juice, we are feeding the bad bacteria that causes cavities. These bacteria will metabolize the carbohydrates and produce an acid. This acid eats away at our protective enamel and eventually causes a hole (or a cavity) to form. We will never tell your children to get rid of their teeth, so let's talk about reducing the bad bacteria and cutting off its food supply to break this chain.

Frequency is as important as amount when it comes to sugars

First, we can remove this bad bacteria with good brushing and flossing habits, as well as using kid-friendly mouth rinses once they are old enough to reliably spit in the sink. Brushing with the appropriate amount of fluoridated tooth paste is also very important to fight this bacteria. Fluoride helps the teeth in a lot of ways: it slows the break down of our enamel, helps to rebuild the enamel, and also blocks the bacteria's ability to use those carbohydrates.

Next, limiting how often those bad bacteria eat will also help keep your children cavity-free. Kids love to snack and they would munch on crackers or fruit snacks all day, everyday, if we let them. While it's important to give them healthy snacks, it's also important to limit the frequency of their snacking and do your best to avoid "grazing habits" where they are continually eating. Lastly, always give them a glass of milk or water afterwards to rinse out any of the food debris that might be left on their teeth. All of this will help cut down on the acid attack on their enamel.

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BREAK THE CHAIN!

HEALTHY SNACKS FOR HEALTHY SMILES!

Kids love to snack, so make sure you're doing it right. You can't go wrong with fruits, vegetables, cheese sticks, and other healthy foods. Try to avoid snacks with high sugar content, sticky or gummy texture, and things like crackers that will get packed into the chewing surfaces of their molars. Set a timer for 10-15 minutes so your kids aren't grazing their way through the morning or afternoon. Remember to give them something to drink afterwards to help rinse everything off their teeth.



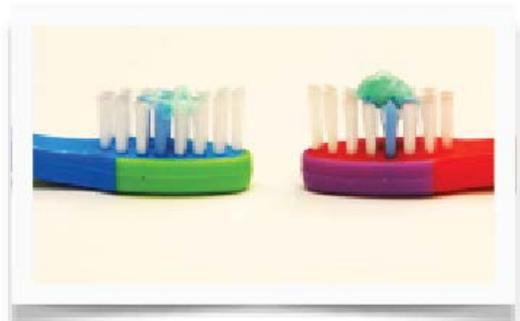
BRUSH THE RIGHT WAY!

You should help to brush your children's teeth until they have the dexterity to be able to tie their own shoe laces. As they get closer to that age, you will brush their teeth for them less often, but be sure to stay involved. I recommend sitting down next to the bathroom on the floor and having your child rest their head on your leg so you can see directly into their mouth. This also keeps their head still instead of wobbling around. Plus, this allows you to easily use your non-dominant hand to gently pull their cheeks and lips out of the way to brush in the back.



USING FLUORIDE

Parents often have questions about fluoride. Fluoride toothpaste is both safe and effective when used appropriately. You can start using fluoride as soon as the first tooth erupts in the mouth, but for children ages 0-3, only use a rice-size amount or smear. For children ages 3-6, use a pea-size of toothpaste. At these levels, you still get the benefits of fluoride, but limit the risks of getting fluorosis in the future.



REMEMBER THE RULE OF 2'S!

This simple rule has three easy questions to help your kids remember the basics. (Hint: The answer is always 2.) How many minutes do you brush your teeth? 2! How many times a day should you brush your teeth? 2! How many times a year should you go see the dentist? 2!



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