

How Decay Can Take Your Health Away



Letting Your Teeth Go to Your Head

What is tooth decay, anyway?

Simply put, it's cavities.

How are cavities created? By the bacteria in your mouth. Everyone's mouth contains millions of bacteria, both good and bad. As icky as it may sound, it's true. And if your mouth isn't cleaned daily, those bacteria rapidly form plaque. Plaque develops as a sticky film weaving bacteria and food debris together. The toxic waste that results is acid.

This acid brew begins to dissolve away your tooth enamel, even if left undisturbed for only 24 hours. Enamel serves as your teeth's armor against decay. If the armor weakens under the acid attack, the acid penetrates deeper into the softer inner portion of the tooth. Your vulnerable, unprotected teeth begin to fall apart. Extensive damage often occurs before the first pain symptom ever shows up. In fact, pain is often a sign that decay has reached an advanced stage.



So how do you keep your teeth intact and cavity-free? Your first line of defense comes from brushing and flossing your teeth at least twice a day. Consistent home care serves as the cornerstone of maintaining a healthy mouth. And brushing properly with the right technique makes all the difference. Start in one area and work carefully across each surface in a consistent pattern for two minutes, and apply the same diligence to flossing. You'll be amazed at what a difference a few minutes can make.

8 Tips to Keep Decay at Bay

#1 Regular Dentist Visits

An essential ingredient of good oral hygiene involves regularly scheduled maintenance with our office. Most dental problems develop slowly over time

and often don't involve symptoms until they've become serious. Working preventive appointments with one of our hygienists into your calendar helps pay dividends throughout your life. The consistent removal of mineralized plaque, called tartar, reduces

the bacterial load in your mouth. We also examine hidden areas of your teeth for cavities while looking for any changes in the vast soft tissue that lines your mouth.

#2 Moderation

Even when you diligently brush and floss, certain foods continue to provide an energy source for acid-producing bacteria. Foods high in starch and sugar comprise a dream diet for these germs. The more carbohydrates that flow through the mouth, the more acid that works away on your enamel. And foods already high in acid, like wine, coffee, and citrus, give an extra pH decline to the mouth's environment. Try to avoid exposure to sugary foods, or at least enjoy them in moderation or at regular mealtimes.

#3 Sugar Bugs

You probably know the obvious sugary suspects - candy, soda and desserts - but there are foods that

you may not think of as being sugar offenders. Energy drinks pack a lot of sugar, as do most fruit juices and other man-made beverages. Many of the milk alternatives such as soy, almond and coconut milk have added sugar. If you fancy these over cow milk, opt for an unsweetened variety. Watch out for flavored milks, though, like chocolate – your cup runneth over with sugar.

“ *Did you know that gum disease increases your risk of a heart attack by nearly 50%, according to a recent study published in the American Heart Association Journal?* ”



Other sugar land-mines are low-fat and non-fat foods. Often companies will add sugar to these foods to make up for the loss of taste-enhancing fat.

#4 Age is Irrelevant

Anyone, young or old, is susceptible to tooth decay if they do not clean and care for their teeth on a regular basis. Young children are particularly at risk. It's estimated that 42% of kids aged 2 - 11 years have had their first set of teeth fall victim to decay, and 32% of children aged 9 – 11 years have experienced decay in their permanent teeth. Added sugar in baby formula is one contributing factor to this, along with the sugary fruit juices young children are often given. Even a mother's milk is slightly sweet and can cause cavities in baby teeth if not flushed out after feeding.

#5 Serious as a Heart Attack

Sometimes the mouth seems like it's own separate domain, but don't forget it's the gateway to a much larger system. Did you know that gum disease allows mouth bacteria to enter your bloodstream through bleeding gums? They can travel to the heart and fine arteries of the brain and lead to heart attack or stroke. And an abscessed tooth could leave you with a life-threatening infection. So poor oral hygiene affects your teeth AND your overall well-being, a link that loads of new research continues to support.

#6 Bacteria Build-up

If bacteria freely accumulate on your teeth and around your gums like overflowing garbage, infection results. Gum disease means inflamed, bleeding gums and destruction of the bone around your teeth. As your immune system reacts to the massive bacterial load, more inflammation builds in the gums and your body. Chronic inflammation may affect other conditions such as diabetes or arthritis, making these ailments more challenging to control.

#7 Maintain Immunity

Your immune system also creates inflammation in an effort to fight the infection. If that infection is not put in its place, the inflammation and the chemicals it produces will gnaw away at your gums and bone. Inflammation can also cause

Here are some additional tips for grade A oral health:

- Brush and floss twice a day
- Be sure to brush and floss in the tight, hard-to-reach places
- Rinse your toothbrush thoroughly to avoid putting bacteria back into your mouth
- Never share toothbrushes - sharing a toothbrush means sharing bacteria
- Cut down on sugary drinks and desserts
- Drink sugary drinks through a straw – this allows less contact with teeth and gums
- Drink water after eating a meal or sugar-laden foods. Swish it around your mouth to help wash away food and sugar
- See a dentist every six months for a cleaning and evaluation
- Get cavities filled immediately – unattended cavities only get worse and can lead to an abscess and root canal, or worse



inflammation in your blood vessels. What does that mean? Inflamed blood vessels can inhibit blood flow - to your heart and your brain – which could cause a heart attack, stroke, and even dementia.

#8 Don't Expose Yourself

Many studies suggest that illnesses like heart disease, endocarditis, and Alzheimer's are at least linked to poor oral health, if not caused by it. But not only can it make you susceptible to other sicknesses, it can also complicate current health conditions. Maladies such as diabetes or autoimmune diseases lower your body's ability to fight other infections. With your immune system already strained it's not as strong to fight bacteria in your mouth.

Without a healthy mouth, you cannot have a healthy body.