



## Your Smile. Diet and Oral Health

Good dental health can be achieved by a combination of dental hygiene, and watching what we eat and drink. The nutrients calcium and Vitamin D are very essential for good bone and teeth development and care must be taken to ensure an adequate supply.

**Calcium** is found in milk, cheese, yogurts, custards, pizza, lasagne and to a lesser extent in some fruits and vegetables. One should include at least 3 servings from this group every day.

**Vitamin D** is found in oily fish like sardines, salmon, mackerel, herring and is also added to some margarine and butter spreads. The action of the sunlight on our skin can also produce vitamin D for our bodies. For more information on these nutrients please see the subsection on healthy eating on our website.

Dental problems are caused by either tooth erosion or tooth decay. Tooth erosion is caused by the consumption of acidic foods or drink e.g. fruit juices or soft drinks while tooth decay is caused by bacteria in our mouth which act on the sugars in our food and attack our teeth. Each time we eat or drink we increase the acid levels in our mouth and thus increase our risk of damaging our teeth hence we recommend that we limit these 'acid attacks' to 6 times approx per day. Saliva in our mouth produces a natural protective factor for our teeth. Good dental health begins at a very early age and simple steps taken early on can help to improve our teeth.

### 1. Babies and young children.

To help avoid tooth decay in young children you can follow the following steps. Breast milk is the best way to feed a new born baby however a large number of babies are bottle fed. Bottle fed infants and babies should be fed and put to bed not put to bed and fed. as this encourages a bad habit where as they get older they will require a bottle to fall asleep. This bottle will contain either milk or juice and these remain around the teeth encouraging tooth



bottle will contain either milk or juice and these remains around the teeth encouraging tooth decay and/or erosion... As soon as your baby can start to grasp and hold items introduce a feeding cup and start to wean off the bottle This feeding cup can contain unsweetened fruit juices diluted to 1; 4, water or milk Colas, squashes etc should never be added to baby's bottles. Bottle feeding should be discontinued by a child's first birthday. Never dip dummies/comforters in jam, sugar honey etc.

## 2. Children.

Recent studies have shown us that 40% of children in the 9-17 year age group are eating sugary high fat foods like fizzy drinks, sweets biscuits etc three or more times/day.

- Suitable healthy snacks for children are as follows Fruits, vegetables, yogurts, cheese, plain popcorn, breads, nuts (ensure your child is over 3 so to avoid any risk of choking)
- Suitable healthy drinks are as follows - Milk, water, sugar free squashes.
- Try to limit the number of times you eat/drink to 6 /day.
- Treats like sweets etc can be included as part of a meal and can be used to encourage a child to finish his meal.
- Avoid sugary foods that dissolve slowly in your mouth e.g. hard boiled sweets, lollipops. These bathe your teeth in sugar for longer and increase your risk of decay and erosion.
- Where soft fizzy drinks are being taken use a straw as this directs the drink to the back of the mouth and helps to avoid the teeth. Sipping these drinks over a prolonged period increases your risk of tooth erosion.
- If drinks are required during the night water is the best choice as our salivary flow is reduced at night.
- Remember dental hygiene is also very important and regular brushing as well as dental check ups should be encouraged.
- Never dip dummies/soothers in honey, jam sugar etc.

For more information on diet and health contact a dietitian at 01- 2804839.

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