



Diet Tips For The Cavity-Prone

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First, the obvious. An active decay problem generally has 2 main causes: diet and bacteria (plaque). Getting things under control requires dealing with both problems. To really make a difference, good oral hygiene is critical. We offer our patients complete, one-on-one oral hygiene instruction it's one of the most valuable services we can provide.

Keep it short and sweet. The amount of sugar you eat in a day is much less important than how long it stays on your teeth. It takes time for plaque bacteria to turn food sugars into decay-causing acid. A little sugar can do tremendous damage if the teeth are exposed to it frequently.

The good news is that you don't have to give up your sweet tooth! You can still have that chocolate cake or that can of pop, as long as you eat it quickly and then leave it alone. Sipping and nibbling does the real harm, even if it doesn't add up to much sugar.

If it sticks, get it off! Sticky sweets stay on your teeth longer, and have more chance to cause decay. If you eat something sticky, its much more important to brush it off quickly.

Gum is Good. As long as it's sugarfree, chewing gum is beneficial in several ways. The chewing action tends to rub at least some food off the teeth. The extra saliva flow that chewing stimulates helps to wash sugars away from the teeth. Finally, some of the plant sweeteners (especially xylitol or "Dentec") actually interfere with the cavity producing action

of plaque bacteria.

Just a minor caution here. Excessive gum chewing can aggravate TMJ or jaw problems, and people with jaw troubles should avoid it.

Give other sweeteners another try. Not all "artificial" sweeteners are created alike. Many people have given up on sugarfree products because of the bitter aftertaste of aspartame (Nutrasweet). We don't like that stuff much either. Besides the aftertaste, it breaks down with heat (so you can't bake with it), and some health concerns have been raised.

Sucralose (Splenda) is another alternate sweetener, a chemical derivative of sugar. It does not have the health concerns of Aspartame, and tastes very close to real sugar. It comes in two forms: a concentrated form in packets, and a spoonable form with the same sweetness as sugar.

Other natural sweeteners are also safe for teeth because mouth bacteria can't digest them. These include sorbitol, mannitol, and xylitol. Many foods available in the diet section of the grocery store contain these sweeteners and are much easier on your teeth. You can even get sugarfree candies at the grocery store.