

Diet and Snacking

(As recommended by the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry)

Q: What is a healthy diet for my child?

A healthy diet is a balanced diet that naturally supplies all the nutrients your child needs to grow. What's a balanced diet? One that includes the following major food groups every day: fruits and vegetables, breads and cereals, milk and dairy products, meat, fish, and eggs.

Q: How does my child's diet affect her dental health?

Your child must have a balanced diet for their teeth to develop properly. Your child also needs a balanced diet for healthy gum tissue around the teeth. Equally important, a diet high in certain kinds of carbohydrates, such as sugar and starches, may place your child at extra risk of tooth decay.

Q: How do I make my child's diet safe for his teeth?

First, be sure your child has a balanced diet. Then, check how frequently your child eats foods with sugar or starch in them. Foods with starch include breads, crackers, pasta and such snacks as pretzels and potato chips. When checking for sugar, look beyond the sugar bowl and candy dish. A variety of foods contain one or more types of sugar, and all types of sugars can promote dental decay. Fruits, a few vegetables and most milk products have at least one type of sugar.

Sugar can be found in many processed foods even some that do not taste sweet. For example, a peanut butter and jelly sandwich not only has sugar in the jelly, but may have sugar added to the peanut butter. Sugar is also added to such condiments as ketchup and salad dressing.

Q: Should my child give up all foods with sugar or starch?

No. Many provide nutrients your child needs. You simply need to select and serve them wisely. Food with sugar or starch is safer for teeth if it's eaten with a meal, not as a snack. Sticky foods, such as dried fruit or toffee, are not easily washed away from the teeth by saliva, water or milk. Therefore, they have more cavity-causing potential than foods more rapidly cleared from the teeth. Talk to your pediatric dentist about selecting and serving foods that protect your child's dental health.

Q: My youngest isn't on solid foods yet. Do you have any suggestions?

Do not nurse your child to sleep or put her to bed with a bottle of milk, formula, juice, or sweetened liquid. While your child sleeps, any unswallowed liquid in the mouth supports bacteria that produce acids and attack the teeth. Protect your child from severe tooth decay by putting him/her to bed with nothing more than a pacifier or bottle of water.

Q: How are cavities formed?

To the bacteria in your child's mouth, sugar is something that can be used to form acid which dissolves tooth enamel. It is not what you eat but how often you eat and how long the food stays in your child's mouth after your child has finished eating. Bacteria can produce acids for at least 30 minutes after you eat. This is why frequent eating is one factor contributing to tooth decay. Another fact is how long the food remains in your mouth after your child eats.

Consider what this means if you:

- Eat a cracker that clings to your teeth for more than an hour
- Sip a sugared soft drink throughout the afternoon.
- Nurse a sore throat by sucking on sugary lozenges, one after another

Here is a list of foods that like to stay around your child's mouth

- **Barely sticky:** apples, bananas, hot fudge sundaes, milk chocolate bars
- **Moderately sticky:** white bread, caramels, crème-filled sponge cake
- **Stickier:** dried figs, jelly beans, plain doughnuts, raisins
- **Stickiest:** granola bars, oatmeal cookies, potato chips, salted crackers, puffed oat cereal, crème-filled sandwich cookies, peanut butter crackers.

Many children need snacks daily to help meet their nutritional needs, and parents should choose and offer snack foods accordingly. Most children can safely snack three or four times a day, in addition to regular meals. This number should be dentally harmless for the child who:

- Brushes thoroughly twice daily with a fluoride toothpaste
- Gets sufficient fluoride from sources such as drinking water, over-the-counter fluoride toothpastes, and topical fluoride treatments applied by the dentist
- Has protective sealant applied to the chewing surfaces of the teeth
- Sees a dentist regularly

Below are suggestions for proper snacks and snacks with high sugar content:

PROPER SNACKS

Fruits	Vegetables	Miscellaneous
Apples	Carrots	Cheese
Bananas	Cauliflower	Popcorn
Berries (all kinds)	Cucumbers	Nuts
Cantaloupe	Celery	Pizza
Grapefruit	Radishes	Eggs
Grapes	Tomatoes	Oatmeal
Oranges	Broccoli	Meat, Fish
Peaches		Poultry
Pears		Whole Wheat Flour
Pineapple, fresh		Milk
Watermelon		Unsweetened & Diet Drinks

SWEETENED SNACKS

Snack	Portion	Sugar Content
Cup cake (iced)	1	6 tsp.
Chewing gum	1 stick	1/2 tsp.
Doughnut (glazed)	1	6 tsp.
Soda Pop	1 - 12-oz. can	6 - 10 tsp.
Marshmallow	1	1-1/3 tsp.
Hershey Bar	1	8 tsp.
Raisins	1/4 cup	4 tsp.
Chocolate Milk	1 cup	6 tsp.
Jello	1/2 cup	4-1/2 tsp.
Syrup, Maple	1 tbs.	2-1/2 tsp.

Helpful Anti-Cavity Foods:

- Chewing Gum – sugarless gum or regular gum containing xylitol which can help stimulate saliva to help wash food particles from teeth. Saliva contains buffers to neutralize acid and brings minerals and fluoride to the tooth surface to heal early cavities.
- Cheese – especially aged cheddar, Monterey Jack, and Swiss. Cheese helps to stimulate the flow of saliva and repair early cavities.

OVERVIEW:

- Ask Dr. Bill, Dr. Angie, Dr. Ryan or Dr. Doug to help you assess your child's diet.
- Shop smart! Do not routinely stock your pantry with sugary or starchy snacks. Buy “fun food” just for special times.
- Limit the number of snack times, choose nutritious snacks.
- Provide a balanced diet and save foods with sugar or starch for mealtimes.
- Do not put your child to bed with a bottle of milk, formula, or juice.
- If your child chews gum or sips soda, choose those without sugar. Soda can create acidic conditions in the mouth conducive to creating cavities.