

Oral Health and Diet

As you are probably aware, eating the right foods and the right amounts of foods can help you live a longer, healthier life. What you eat can prevent or control illnesses such as diabetes, heart disease, and high blood pressure.

Bacteria from **dental plaque**, that sticky film of bacteria over your teeth, uses the sugar and starch to produce acids that can destroy the hard surface of the tooth, which leads to tooth decay (dental caries).

(See ORHIS 2)

Dental caries is associated with the **amount and frequency of consumption of foods and drinks containing sugar**. For example, confectionary bars, biscuits, soft drinks and other snack foods can produce dental caries.

Other less obvious foods may also contain sugars. For example, dry fruit, milk, bread, honey, cereals and many processed foods. The key to choosing foods wisely is not to completely avoid these foods, but to think carefully before you eat.

To promote oral health and prevent tooth decay, you must develop sensible eating habits.

Not only what you eat, but also when you eat makes a big difference to your dental health.

Here are two tips for better oral health:

I) Eat a balanced diet.

II) Limit between-meal snacks.

I) To achieve a balanced diet, eat a variety of foods. Choose foods from each of the five major food groups:

1) Breads, cereals and other grain products.

- * Dry beans (such as red beans, broad beans, and soybeans), lentils, and chickpeas.

- * Whole grains, such as wheat, rice, oats, corn, and barley.

- * Whole grain breads and cereals.

2) Fresh fruit

3) Vegetables

4) Lean meat, poultry prepared without skin, and fish

5) Low-fat dairy products (milk, cheese and yogurt).

II) To limit the number of snacks that you eat between-meals, if you do snack:

1) Choose nutritious foods, such as cheese, raw vegetables, plain yogurt, or a piece of fruit.

2) Avoid soft, sweet, sticky foods, such as cakes, candy and dried fruits. Have these at meal times only.

Foods that are eaten as part of a meal cause less harm. More saliva is released during a meal, which helps wash foods from the mouth and helps lessen the effects of the acids produced by the bacteria.

People wearing dentures must be especially conscious about maintaining a good and balanced diet.