



# Dogwood Family Dentistry Centre

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## Good Nutrition Makes Healthy Teeth!

Although we can't control the exact type of oral flora (type of bacteria) in our mouths, we can certainly keep the numbers of bacteria down with excellent oral hygiene, good diet choices and eating habits.

### Healthy Food Choices

The bacteria in the mouth will use sugars from foods to repopulate and cause tooth destruction, if they are allowed to increase in numbers. The oral bacteria love sugar! In addition, the bacteria produce acid and destroy enamel and dentin. Minerals in saliva help to harden (remineralize) the teeth and resist decay, so it is important that teeth have a break from food throughout the day. Ideally, **allow two hours between meals and snacks** to give the saliva a chance to buffer the acids and remineralize the teeth.

When you are deciding on healthy food choices, the basic rules of thumb are the following:

1. Try to choose foods in their natural form. The less processed, the better. For example, whole fruits are better than juices.
2. Check the ingredients – if sugar is the first or second ingredient on the list, you are best to not choose this as a diet option.
3. Completely avoid sticky and sweet foods (fruit leathers or bars, packaged cookies and other sweet snacks). A fruit should always be the first option for a sweet snack.
4. Remove all sweetened drinks from the diet. Introduce water. Remember that even milk has a very high sugar content, and so should be left for breakfast only. Fruit juices are very high in sugar, and don't have the fibre that whole fruits can offer.
5. **Avoid shopping for foods in the middle aisles of the grocery store.** Stick to the outside aisle of the store. This is where one will find the healthy, unprocessed foods.
6. Remove all carbonated drinks from the diet. Carbonated drinks are generally high in sugar, and without any nutritional value. The carbonation in these drinks creates a high acid environment – something that the bacteria love! In addition, sweet liquids easily get in between the teeth and can cause decay in those sites.
7. Drink coffees and teas without milk and sugar. Even if you just learn to drink without sugar, you will make a big difference to the bacteria counts in your mouth.
8. Incorporate lots of vegetables in every meal.
9. School lunches should have carrot sticks, celery sticks or any other hard vegetable (these hard crunchy vegetables also help to cleanse the teeth). Teach children to consider these the 'mouth cleaning' or 'dessert' foods.
10. Candy should be only eaten on a very infrequent basis (less than once per week). The sugar content is very high, and it provides no nutritional value. It is best to avoid hard or chewy candy as much as possible

because of the length of time it is in contact with the teeth. Choose chocolate or a cookie, over jujube, lollipops or gummi bears.

11. Good eating habits can only be created by example. Do not assume what will or will not be eaten by your family. Make healthy well-balanced meals with lots of variety, and persevere in continuing to offer these good eating choices. At the very least, the young members of your family will grow up knowing how to make a healthy meal. Remember that picky eaters eventually grow up, and stop being so choosy. Endeavour to give them the knowledge to make healthy well-balanced meals.

## **Healthy Diet Habits**

1. Eat only at designated meal times. Do not snack constantly through the day, as this is a great way to constantly feed the bacteria in the mouth. Keep in mind that there is no need for constant snacking once a child is no longer a toddler.
2. Try to limit your eating to three substantial meals per day. Eat enough healthy calories at these designated meal-times so that you are not having to snack constantly between meals.
3. If snacking does occur, make sure that it is always accompanied by a full brushing and flossing of the teeth immediately afterwards. If snacks are offered, the foods should consist of proteins and produce. Examples of these are the following:
  - a. Apple slices and almond butter
  - b. Plain yogurt and applesauce
  - c. Plain yogurt with berries and sunflower seeds
  - d. Cheese or cottage cheese with apple slices
  - e. Peanut butter on celery sticks
  - f. Hummus, tzadziki, or guacamole on any vegetable
  - g. Sliced chicken breast and berries
  - h. Tofu chunks and edanamme
  - i. 'popsicles' made with frozen plain yogurt and fruit puree
  - j. Any fresh fruits or vegetables
  - k. Roasted seaweed or roasted chick peas
  - l. Trail mix with nuts, seeds and dark chocolate chips (no dried fruit)
  - m. Hard boiled egg, cheese cubes and cherry tomatoes
  - n. Pickles and olives with feta cheese
4. Avoid using sports drinks at all costs! These electrolyte drinks are full of sugar. If you are a high-level athlete and feel that you need extra electrolytes, try to find drinks that do not have sugar in them.
5. Water should be the drink of choice at meals, and in between. If you choose to offer juice, it should be limited to  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup per day (undiluted), and offered with a meal.
6. Brush the teeth AFTER breakfast (not before), so that the teeth can have a few hours without any food or bacteria present.
7. If possible, brush the teeth after all meals, including lunchtime.
8. Brush the teeth immediately AFTER dinner and do not snack before bedtime. This allows the teeth to be free of bacteria and food for the entire night.
9. If a treat (dessert, sugary item) is to be incorporated into the week, pick a designated time and be sure to thoroughly clean the teeth afterwards. A good idea might be to pick one dinner or lunch per week to allow for a treat (as long as good oral hygiene follows).

**10.** Remove desserts and treats from the diet, except on special or infrequent occasions.

**11.** For young children, be sure to discuss healthy food options with them on a regular basis. For example, explain why whole fruits are better than juices, and why vegetables should be a part of every meal (nutritional value, fibre content, and cleansing action).

## **Good Oral Hygiene**

1. Be sure to keep regular dental appointments and to have dental x-rays taken on a regular basis.
2. Ask your dentist/hygienist to give you help with oral hygiene techniques, and to help reinforce habits that are difficult to maintain with children.
3. Be sure to brush with a fluoridated toothpaste and floss daily.
4. Ask your dentist/hygienist about using high fluoride mouth rinses.
5. Remember that children under the age of 10 years old do not have the dexterity to provide their own oral hygiene. Allow them to brush by themselves, and then brush their teeth (while having them lying flat on the floor or bed, in order to provide you with the best and safest access).

If you are following all the above recommendations and are still frustrated by the amount of dental decay you continually have with your teeth, you may want to consider DNA testing, with OraVital. By identifying the type of micro-organisms in your mouth, we can target these bugs through the use of specific antibiotic rinses. Any of our dental team members would be happy to answer your questions about oral DNA testing.