

## A Well-Balanced Diet Leads to a Healthy Smile

What you eat is significant to your overall health, as well as your dental health. Foods that contain sugars of any kind can contribute to tooth decay. Almost all foods, including milk and vegetables, have some type of sugar. This doesn't mean that you should eliminate all foods that contain sugar from your diet because many of them contain important nutrients. To help control the amount of sugar you consume, read food labels and choose foods and beverages that are low in added sugars. Added sugars are found in soft drinks, candy, cookies and pastries. You can maintain a balanced diet by including food from the four major food groups.



1. Dairy  
(milk, yogurt, cheese)
2. Meat  
(including poultry & fish)
3. Fruits & Vegetables
4. Whole grains  
(breads, cereals)

*-As recommended by The National Institutes of Health*

### **Avoid snacks high in sugar and carbohydrates!**

Foods that tend to stick to teeth like peanut butter, caramel, and honey are well known for destroying teeth and gums. The sugars in these foods provide bacteria with energy to grow, reproduce, and create enamel-eating acid which destroys teeth. When these foods get stuck to the teeth, bacteria cannot be cleared out by chewing and swallowing.

The key to preventing bacteria from destroying teeth and gums is to avoid having sugar in the mouth for extended periods of time. Limit the number of snacks that you eat. Each time you eat foods that contain sugars, acids attack the teeth for 20 minutes or more. When you snack, choose dentally healthy foods such as nuts, raw vegetables, plain yogurt, cheese and sugarless gum or candy, and refrain from sipping sugary drinks.

Consuming sugary foods with a meal or for dessert has a less detrimental effect, because increased saliva flow during meals helps to wash foods from the mouth and lessens the effects of acids. When you eat foods such as crackers, cookies and chips, eat them as part of your meal, instead of by themselves. Combinations of foods neutralize acids in the mouth and slow down tooth decay. For example, enjoy cheese with your crackers. Your snack will be just as satisfying and better for your dental health.

When you do eat meals or snacks containing large amounts of sugars, carbohydrates, or "sticky" foods which tend to get stuck to teeth, make sure to follow the meal with water to help wash off food particles remaining on teeth. If possible, brush your teeth immediately after each meal with fluoride toothpaste.

*Oral Health & Wellness content provided by the American Dental Association, the American Academy of Periodontology and the Academy of General Dentistry.*