



## Diet Tips to Prevent Dental Problems

A balanced diet, with plenty of calcium ([/English/ages-stages/teen/nutrition/Pages/Importance-of-Calcium.aspx](#)) and vitamin D ([/English/healthy-living/nutrition/Pages/Vitamin-D-On-the-Double.aspx](#)) to increase calcium absorption, should provide all the nutrients necessary to build strong teeth and keep gums and mouth tissues healthy. Young people can get adequate calcium from 3 or 4 daily servings of dairy foods, as well as from many other sources (eg, calcium-processed tofu, calcium-fortified orange juice, green vegetables such as broccoli).



## The Benefits of Fluoride

Fluoride reduces dental decay by making the enamel harder, reducing the ability of bacteria to produce acid that erodes enamel, and by replacing minerals in the teeth after they have been lost. In areas where the natural fluoride content of the water is low and water supplies are not fluoridated, or if your household uses bottled or reverse osmosis filtered water, pediatricians and dentists may advise fluoride supplements, fluoride toothpaste, or fluoride treatments to strengthen children's tooth enamel against decay. Most bottled water does not contain adequate amounts of fluoride. Home water treatment systems like reverse osmosis and distillation units remove much of the fluoride from tap water. However, carbon or charcoal water filtration systems generally do not remove substantial amounts of fluoride.

## Too Much Fluoride & Fluorosis

One of the complications of too much fluoride is dental fluorosis. Fluorosis ranges from minor white lines that run across the teeth to a chalky appearance of the teeth with brown staining. Fluorosis can be caused by prescribing fluoride supplements ([/English/ages-stages/baby/feeding-nutrition/Pages/Fluoride-Supplements.aspx](#)) in communities with fluoridated water, or young children ([/english/ages-stages/preschool/Pages/default.aspx](#)) swallowing fluoridated toothpaste. To avoid this latter problem, children should use no more than a smear of fluoridated toothpaste before age 2, if your child's pediatrician or dentist suggests using fluoridated toothpaste. For children older than age 2, use only a small pea-sized amount of fluoridated toothpaste. Also, your pediatrician or pediatric dentist ([/English/family-life/health-management/pediatric-specialists/Pages/What-is-a-Pediatric-Dentist.aspx](#)) will know the fluoride content of your local water and can advise you if a supplement is necessary or excessive.

## Damaging Sugars

All sugars promote the growth of mouth bacteria that produce acid and cause tooth decay ([/English/ages-stages/baby/teething-tooth-care/Pages/Preventing-Tooth-Decay.aspx](#)). Unrefined sugars such as honey, maple syrup, and molasses are just as damaging as refined white sugar in this respect. The worst offenders are the sugars in sticky foods that cling to teeth, such as dried fruit leathers and candies. Sodas and sweetened juice drinks ([/English/healthy-living/nutrition/Pages/Where-We-Stand-Fruit-Juice.aspx](#)) leave the teeth awash in sugar. Cereals ([/English/news/Pages/Low-Sugar-Cereals-Win-Nutrition-Contest-at-Breakfast.aspx](#)) and other starchy foods, such as popcorn, leave a residue that bacteria rapidly convert to sugar.

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