

Healthy Teeth and Your Child's Diet

Besides regular toothbrushing (/English/healthy-living/oral-health/Pages/Toothbrushing-Tips-for-Young-Children.aspx), a child's diet plays a key role in overall dental health.

Often, sugar is the biggest villain. The longer and more frequently your child's teeth are exposed to sugar, the greater the risk of cavities. "Sticky sugar" foods such as sticky caramel, toffee, gum, and dried fruit—particularly when it stays in the mouth and bathes the teeth in sugar for hours—could do serious damage.



- · Make sure to always brush your child's teeth after a sugary food item.
- Do not allow young children to have any sugar-containing liquid in a sippy cup for a prolonged period. See How to Prevent Tooth Decay in Your Baby (/English/ages-stages/baby/teething-tooth-care/Pages/How-to-Prevent-Tooth-Decay-in-Your-Baby.aspx).

How to Cut Down on Sweets

Almost everyone naturally enjoys sweets, and your child is no different. Children are born with a taste for sugar, and they are already quite sensitive to different concentrations of sweetness. Offer children a yam and a baked potato, and they'll take the yam every time. Give kids a choice between the yam and a cookie, and the cookie will win (/English/ages-stages/toddler/nutrition/Pages/Winning-the-Food-Fights.aspx).

Rest assured, it's not your fault if your kids make a beeline for the candy and ice cream when you'd rather they take a piece of cheese instead. But limiting access to sweets and providing a diet made up of more nutritious foods (/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/nutrition/Pages/Making-Healthy-Food-Choices.aspx) promotes growth, not tooth decay.

TV advertising

Television advertising, incidentally, can be a serious obstacle to your child's good nutrition (/English/healthy-living/nutrition/Pages/Childhood-Nutrition.aspx). Some studies show that children who watch over twenty-two hours of TV per week (over three hours of screen time a day) have a greater tendency to become obese. Children are extremely receptive to ads for sugary cereals and sweets, especially after they've visited other homes where these foods are served. Obesity (/English/health-issues/conditions/obesity/Pages/Obesity-Prevention-AAP-Policy-Explained.aspx) is a growing problem among children in America. So keep an eye on eating habits, at home and away, to make sure your child is eating as healthy a diet as possible.

At home

To combat outside influences, stock up on low-sodium (/English/healthy-living/nutrition/Pages/We-Dont-Need-to-Add-Salt-to-Food.aspx), low-sugar, and low-fat products at home. Eventually kids become accustomed to healthy foods, which may make them less susceptible to the temptation of the more sugary, salty, or greasy ones.

Additional Information:

• How to Prevent Tooth Decay in Your Baby (/English/ages-stages/baby/teething-tooth-care/Pages/How-to-revent-Tooth-Decay-in-Your-Baby.aspx)

oothbrushing Tips for Young Children (/English/healthy-living/oral-health/Pages/Toothbrushing-Tips-for-Young-Children.aspx)

- Obesity Prevention: AAP Policy Explained (/English/health-issues/conditions/obesity/Pages/Obesity-Prevention-AAP-Policy-Explained.aspx)
- Why Regular Dental Visits Are Important (/English/healthy-living/oral-health/Pages/Why-Regular-Dental-Visits-Are-Important.aspx)

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