

FN2276 (July 2025)



Nourish Your Teeth



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Have you been to the dentist in the last year? Do you fear going to the dentist? Routine visits to the dentist are essential to keeping up with your oral health. Dental experts recommend that we visit the dentist every six months to ensure proper oral hygiene and to check for oral health.

If you are prone to conditions like gum disease, cavities, or other oral health conditions, your dentist may recommend you go more often.

Oral health

Oral health refers to the condition of your teeth, gums, jaw, facial muscles and oral secretions. Oral health is one of the 10 leading overall health indicators. Good oral health enables you to speak, smile and eat. Poor dental health can be painful, disabling, costly and a major obstacle to eating.

Adequate brushing **and** flossing are crucial for prevention of tooth decay and protection of general oral health and should be performed daily. Be sure to brush your teeth twice daily and floss once daily.

- Visit the American Dental Association's website (ada.org) for resources on brushing/flossing techniques and toothbrush/toothpaste selection.

Nutrition and our teeth

Our food and beverage choices can impact our oral health.

Sugar

Added sugars come from white sugar, brown sugar and many sweetened foods and drinks. Sugars may be found in foods like salad dressing and spaghetti sauce. Added sugars contribute to tooth decay, especially when brushing/flossing is neglected. Replacing sweetened foods with items that do not contain added sugars will decrease the risk of tooth decay.

Non-nutritive sweeteners

Consider replacing added sugars with sugar substitutes, such as Xylitol, if you are concerned about dental health and development of cavities.



Did you know?

Sugar-free gum works to stimulate saliva secretion, which helps to reduce the risk of cavities.

Dairy products and other calcium sources

Dairy products provide calcium. Calcium remineralizes our teeth and works to prevent cavity formation. Try natural cheeses, reduced-fat cow's milk and other low-fat dairy products to increase calcium intake. Read and compare Nutrition Facts labels.

Beverages

Specialty coffee drinks and some carbonated beverages, including soda and flavored drinks, may have added sugars, leading to increased risk of dental concerns. Citric or phosphoric acids may be present in carbonated beverages, which can also weaken teeth and promote decay.

Fiber

Foods including fruits, vegetables and whole grains contain dietary fiber. Fiber helps to neutralize the acid in your mouth that promotes dental decay. Saliva secretion is stimulated by fiber intake. Also, chewing on crunchy raw vegetables helps to clean starchy food away from teeth.

Vitamins and minerals

As part of an overall balanced diet with adequate protein, enjoy a variety of colorful fruits and vegetables and dairy to obtain the vitamins and minerals that help to reduce the risk of tooth decay and cavities.

Vitamin C: Tomatoes, bell peppers, potatoes and oranges are examples of foods rich in vitamin C.

Vitamin K: Green leafy vegetables are a great source of vitamin K, also important for the health of bones and teeth. Incorporating these foods into your diet can aid in reducing the risk of tooth decay progressing further.

Vitamin D: Read and compare Nutrition Facts labels for their vitamin D content. Some foods have added vitamin D. One cup of fortified low-fat dairy milk contains about 25% of your daily need for vitamin D.

Spend some time (about 10 minutes) in the midday sun during warm months. In winter months, you may need a vitamin D supplement in the amount recommended by your healthcare professional.

Fluoride: Did you know that fluoride is called “nature’s cavity fighter?” We often see fluoride in our toothpaste and may receive fluoride treatments at the dentist’s office. We can also find fluoride in tap water in many cities and in food items we prepare using tap water. If you are unsure if your tap water is fluoridated, check with your county officials.



Nourish and protect your teeth with these tips

If proper oral hygiene and nutrition are not maintained, cavities and other health issues, including tooth loss, oral cancer, gum disease and decreased chewing function, can occur. These conditions may, in turn, lead to difficulty obtaining proper nutrition and maintaining our strength and overall health.

- Make regular oral hygiene, including brushing/flossing, part of your everyday routine.
- Schedule dental checkups and cleanings twice a year or as recommended.
- Include bone- and teeth-maintaining calcium-rich foods in your diet.
- Eat a variety of nutrient-rich fruits, vegetables and other foods.
- Stay well-hydrated.
- Limit added sugars in your daily diet.

See www.ag.ndsu.edu/nourish for more information and online classes about nourishing your body.

For more information on this and other food and nutrition topics, visit: www.ag.ndsu.edu/food

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