

# Snack and Sip All Day? Risk Decay!

## What and how often you eat can affect your teeth

Eating habits and food choices can lead to tooth decay, or cavities. A steady supply of sugary foods and drinks, including sports and energy drinks, can damage teeth. But snacking or "grazing" all day long can also lead to tooth decay.

Plaque (sounds like "back") is a sticky film of bacteria that forms on teeth. When you do not remove plaque from your teeth every day, it builds up. Plaque bacteria use sugar to make acid that attacks enamel, the hard surface of the tooth. The acid can attack tooth enamel for up to 20 minutes after you consume sugary foods or drinks.

When you have sugary foods or drinks many times a day or sip the same sugary drink for a long time, acid attacks the enamel again and again. Repeated acid attacks can cause tooth decay, which must be treated by a dentist.

One way of making smarter food and drink choices is to read their labels to make sure they are low in added sugar. Almost all foods have some type of sugar. You cannot and should not remove all sugar from your diet. Many foods and drinks, like apples, carrots, and milk, naturally contain sugars. They also have vitamins, minerals, and nutrients that your body needs. For teeth to be healthy, they need vitamins, protein, calcium, and phosphorous.

Do you sip soft drinks or other sugary drinks all day at your desk?

Do you use breath mints or eat candy often? Instead of eating meals, do you snack all day? Do you often grab a sports or energy drink when you are tired?

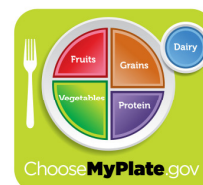
If you answered yes to any of these questions, you may be increasing your chances of tooth decay. Keep reading to find out why.

## A healthy diet keeps your mouth healthy

Eating a healthy diet helps keep you from feeling tired, getting sick, being overweight, and having other health problems, like tooth decay.

### A healthy diet is one that

- is based on fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat dairy products
- includes lean meats, poultry, fish, beans and nuts
- is low in saturated fats, trans fats, salt (sodium), and added sugars
- has foods in the amounts shown on the My Plate picture



### Reduce your risk of tooth decay

- **Limit sugary drinks and snacks between meals**  
Remember, many sports and energy drinks have sugar, too. If you do snack, choose foods that are low in sugar and fat.
- **If you have sugary foods and drinks, have them with meals**  
Saliva increases during meals and helps weaken acid and rinse food particles from the mouth.
- **Chew sugarless gum that has the ADA seal**  
Chewing gum for 20 minutes after meals has been shown to reduce tooth decay.
- **Drink water**  
Drinking tap water with fluoride can help prevent tooth decay. And it can help wash away sugary drinks.
- **See your dentist regularly**