

A Few Facts About Cavities...

The key to a healthy mouth is prevention. It is much easier to prevent cavities than it is to treat teeth with holes in them. It is a common misconception that some people have “soft teeth” or are destined to get cavities no matter what we do. With the exception of some rare genetic disorders and certain conditions that cause dry mouth, most tooth decay is very preventable.

Cavities are caused by bacteria in your mouth that eat the same foods you eat and excrete acid onto your teeth. This acid can dissolve holes in teeth (cavities) if given enough time. The key to preventing decay or an emergency trip to the dental office is to control these bacteria and their waste.

Regular dental cleanings help to remove the cavity causing bacteria that build up on our teeth. No matter how well we brush or floss; there are areas that we just cannot get clean by ourselves. A good dental hygienist can help to get these areas in tip top shape. Daily flossing removes the cavity causing bacteria from in between teeth, just as brushing removes the bugs from the chewing surface, fronts, and sides of the teeth. Also, dental sealants can be placed to keep bacteria from forming happy, little bacteria cities in the grooves, pits, and fissures of our teeth.

Another way to control decay is diet. We all know that sugar feeds cavity bugs and leads to decay. Pop quiz, what is worse for your teeth: a super size 64 ounce coke with dinner or a 16 ounce sweet tea, one sip at a time, between breakfast and lunch? Neither is great, but sipping on a sugary drink for an extended period of time actually does more damage. Moderation is the key. Enjoy that tea with dinner, but try to limit sugary snacks and drinks between meals. Remember it's a function of how long you feed those bacteria that leads to decay.

On the subject of saliva, spit is good for your teeth. Saliva has a mix of enzymes and minerals that help protect teeth from decay. Sugar free gum is a great way to stimulate saliva and clean your teeth after a meal if a toothbrush is not practical. For those with dry mouth (xerostomia) drinking water is also a good way to neutralize the acid that eats into teeth after meals.

Finally, topical fluoride in the form of toothpastes, mouth rinses, and added to drinking water helps to strengthen teeth. Fluoride treatments are especially important for those with dry mouth or those with a lot of fillings and crowns. High doses of topical fluoride have actually been shown to reverse small cavities and protect existing restorations.

Until next week, keep smiling.

-Please send comments to Drs. Parrish at www.ParrishDental.com.