

DRINK WELL

FACT SHEET FOR PARENTS

While an adequate intake of fluids is important at all ages, what your child drinks can affect their oral health. Encourage your child to drink plenty of tap water. Sugary drinks such as soft drinks, sports drinks, cordials and fruit juices are not important for a healthy diet so try to limit how much of these your child drinks. Milk is an important source of calcium and is preferable to sugary drinks.

Water

Children should be encouraged to drink tap water when they are thirsty. Water is a much better thirst quencher than fruit juice and sweetened drinks, as these are acidic and water is not. Encourage water as the drink of choice between meals.

Fluoride and dental decay

Bacteria use sugars to produce acid. When this acid destroys the outer surface of the tooth there is the potential for tooth decay (caries). Fluoride can limit the amount of acid produced in the mouth and can also repair the tooth surface before any permanent damage occurs.

*Dental fluorosis appears as a mottling of the teeth and results from excessive fluoride while teeth are developing (up to approx. 6-8 years of age). Fluorosis does not affect the function of teeth.

Water fluoridation

Fluoride helps protect teeth against decay. It is added to the drinking water in some areas - this is called water fluoridation. The majority of Victorians drink water with either naturally occurring or added fluoride. Fluoride does not have a taste or smell. Therefore, it doesn't alter the taste of your tap water. The only potential side effect is dental fluorosis*, but this can be prevented by the correct use of fluoridated toothpaste and by not using fluoride tablets unless recommended by your dental professional. Importantly, water fluoridation is the least likely source of fluoride to contribute to fluorosis.

For more information about water fluoridation contact the Department of Human Services on 1800 651 723 for a brochure or visit www.health.vic.gov.au/environment/water/fluoridation.htm Your dental professional will also be able to tell you more about fluoride.

waterBOY™



Milk

Milk is an important source of calcium, casein and other essential nutrients. Calcium is necessary for healthy bones and teeth and casein helps prevent tooth decay. Milk is preferable to sugary drinks such as juice, soft drink and cordial - especially between meals.

Sugary Drinks (inc. fruit juices & sports drinks)

Frequent exposure to natural fruit juice and acidic and sweetened drinks may cause loss of tooth enamel and/or decay. Sugars are converted to acid by the bacteria in plaque. This acid dissolves the tooth enamel and can lead to tooth decay. Artificially flavoured carbonated drinks (or soft drinks) are very acidic and should be considered with this group. While most sports drinks do contain sugars for quick bursts of energy, the sugars can also increase the incidence of decay.

Fresh fruit or water is a better alternative to fruit juice. Encourage your child to eat fresh fruit instead of juice when possible.

Who to ask for more information

- ★ Dentist, Dental Therapist or Dental Hygienist
- ★ Maternal and Child Health Nurse
- ★ Family Doctor
- ★ Primary School Nurse
- ★ Dietitian



Other fact sheets for parents include:

