

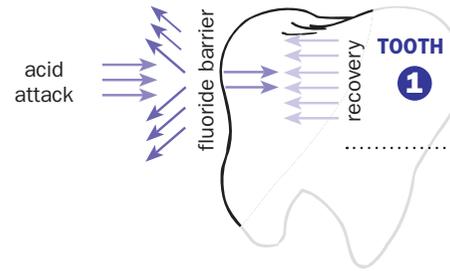
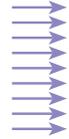
Understanding what causes dental decay and how to control it gives us the power to control most decay in our own mouths.

Home care and lifestyle habits are the key to preventing decay.

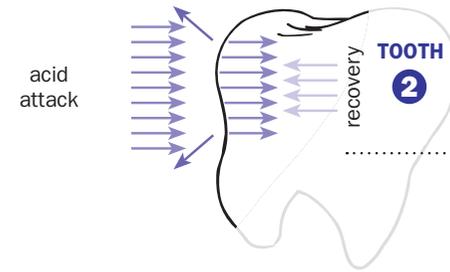
sugar
refined
carbohydrates

plaque

acid



This doesn't need to happen



+ time



“What causes decay?”

Sugar and refined carbohydrates are used by plaque bacteria, producing acids which attack the tooth. Acid **may penetrate below the tooth surface**, and dissolve some tooth minerals.

Natural recovery (or remineralisation) will usually replace much of the tooth mineral lost below the tooth surface. This **‘attack and recovery’** process occurs every time we eat.

If the ‘attack’ outweighs the ‘recovery’ process over longer periods of time, the damage becomes visible and looks like chalky ‘white spots’ on the teeth. Early ‘white spot’ decay can often be seen on teeth along the gumline. If the acid damage continues the white spot turns into a hole in the tooth.

Fluoride (from water and toothpaste) helps toughen the teeth to resist acid attack at the tooth surface, and also helps in the **natural recovery** rebuilding the damaged tooth.

To control and **reverse** dental decay takes some effort, but most gains can be made by developing a few routine habits.

“Why does decay happen?”

Not enough fluoride

- need to drink tap water with fluoride, and :
- need to use a fluoride toothpaste
 - fluoride reduces decay
 - brushing helps remove plaque, reducing both gum infections and plaque acid.

SUGAR: too much – too often

- Soft drinks, cordial and sports drinks, tea and coffee with sugar, sweets and highly sugared snacks e.g. sweet biscuits, health bars.

Dry mouth, which may be caused by some medications (e.g. anti-depressants), drugs and extreme stress

- Saliva helps to protect our teeth by diluting the acid that forms after eating. Dry mouth may increase the chances of tooth decay.

“What can I do to control decay?”

Your dental professional can help you to find what is causing decay in your mouth and advise you on the steps you can take to control it.

Your teeth

- Use toothpaste with fluoride.
- Brush your teeth twice a day
- Your dentist may advise you to ‘Spit, don’t rinse’. After brushing, simply spit out the toothpaste and leave your mouth feeling fresh, instead of rinsing away your ‘mini fluoride treatment’

Your dentist may recommend that you use fluoride mouthrinses or fluoride gels at home. These are very effective in helping you control decay and prevent further damage. Keep out of reach of children.

Decay Decay Decay

Your diet

Healthy alternatives

- Eat healthy regular meals.
- Limit between-meal snacks, and make healthy choices such as fruit, cheese and nuts.
- Try not to substitute sweet snacks with high-salt/ high-fat snacks, as these may lead to other health problems.
- Plain or artificially-sweetened milk drinks instead of soft drinks and sports drinks.
- Drink fluoridated tap water where available, and use it for coffee, tea and in cooking.

If your mouth feels dry . . .

keep your mouth comfortable by:

- chewing sugar-free gum – will increase saliva flow
- frequent sips of water [will also help to wash away food acids]. Note: sipping sweetened drinks to relieve dryness should be avoided.

Dental visits

Visit regularly – your dental professional will help you keep your teeth free of decay and fillings by:

- alerting you to signs of early decay;
- advising you how to stop it progressing; and
- monitoring how successful you are in controlling it.

You may need to make more frequent brief dental visits to check your progress while you are changing your eating and brushing habits. **Not every tooth surface will improve at the same rate** so it is important to check that your home treatment plan is working.

YOU can stop early ‘white spot decay’ becoming a hole in your tooth by good home care.

Your Checklist

Avoid

- using a non-fluoride toothpaste
- frequent sweets and sticky snacks
- tea and coffee **with sugar**
- soft drinks, cordial and sports drinks
- sucking sweets and lozenges if your mouth feels dry
- skipping regular tooth-brushing
- putting off dental visits

Good habits

- healthy snacks – cheese, nuts, fruit
- limiting between-meal snacks and drinks
- brushing teeth with fluoride toothpaste
- sip water if your mouth feels dry
- regular dental visits
- drink fluoridated tap water

It can take time to establish new brushing and eating habits, but it becomes easier as time goes on. You will find that the rewards are worth the effort.

Further information

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Controlling dental decay in your own mouth

– Home care tips



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