

Smiles Better

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This month I've had a lot of anxious mums emailing and coming to the surgery concerned about their kids' teeth. Most kids are brushing twice a day but it's usually their diet that lets them down and the reason that kids are having so many fillings and extractions!!

SO WHAT IS DECAY?

Decay is when the tooth structure becomes soft due to acid attack forming a cavity (hole). Decay occurs when the bacteria in plaque break down the dietary sugars left on the teeth to form acid. If the acid remains on the tooth surface for a long time it can cause those areas of the tooth to decay. The acid attack can last for up to an hour after eating or drinking before the your saliva begins to neutralize the acid and causes the tooth to harden again.

Snacking on sugary or acidic foods and drinks can increase the risk of decay, as the teeth come under constant attack and do not have time to recover. It's therefore really important that you try to make your kids snacks as healthy as possible snacking on cheese and vegetables and avoid giving sugary drinks.

HIDDEN SUGARS!!

When you go to the supermarket do you read the labels of the things your buying, us woman usually look at the calories or fat content. What about the food your buy for your kids, do you look at the amount of sugar their cereal or apple juice contains. We are sometimes easily swayed by labels that say 'no added sugar' or 'natural sugars' but if you have a closer you will general find that the sugar content is still high e.g. sucrose, glucose, fructose and maltose. But its not just plain sugars that are harmful! Other types of carbohydrates foods contain hidden sugars or processed sugars e.g. biscuits, these are also a cause of dental decay.

Also if your child is taking any medications, make sure to ask for sugar free suspensions!

We can never remove all sugars from our diet, but limiting the intake to meal times and avoiding giving kids sugary snacks. Snacking itself is not great, each time we eat we are producing acid which can cause acid attack but in kids snacking is unavoidable. Kids have small tummys and they need to eat little and often. Kids are always on the go, their fast metabolisms burn food so quickly that it's important to the fuel tank from running on empty!

SO WHAT'S BEST TO SNACK ON?

Its best to stick to foods that are low in fat, sugar and salt such as vegetable sticks, fresh or frozen fruit, sandwiches, bread rolls, yoghurts (watch sugar content) and cheese.



Reduce Decay In Your Kids' Teeth



WHAT ABOUT JUICES?

Parents can sometimes view fruit juice as being a healthy drinks for their child because its made from fruit or the label says 'no added sugar' or 'natural', however it still contains high levels of sugar and citric acid!

A 200 ml glass of juice can contain up to 5 teaspoons of sugar!!

Fizzy drinks, isotonic sports drinks and fruit juices also contain acids so not only will they lead to decay but they also cause erosion of teeth.

By allowing kids these drinks on a daily basis you are continually bathing their teeth in sugar and acid!!

Water is the best fluid a child can drink. Water is important for fluid balance and children should be encouraged to drink lots of it from a young age. Children need small drinks often. It's a good idea to give a drink every-time a snack or meal is taken this will help neutralize the acids produced from eating and therefore limiting the chance of decay.

If you find it difficult getting your child to drink water you can dilute their juice, one part juice to 10 parts water, then over time gradually decrease the amount of juice until they can take water.

WHAT ELSE CAN BE DONE TO HELP REDUCE DECAY?

The other important factor in reducing decay is Fluoride!! All children's toothpaste will contain fluoride, it will be stated as ppm (parts per million) fluoride on the tube. In Northern Ireland we have no added fluoride to our water, so we need to give our kids more fluoride in our toothpastes!! Recommended fluoride concentrations for kids are:

up to 3 years : 1000 ppm fluoride e.g. Colgate Smiles 0-3 years
3-6 years: 1350-1500 ppm fluoride e.g. Aquafresh Little Teeth
6+ years: 1350 ppm fluoride and above e.g Pro-enamel for kids or any 6+ adult toothpaste.

If your child has had previous fillings or lost teeth due to decay then your dentist may recommend a fluoride mouthwash, or a stronger fluoride toothpaste. They may also place a fluoride varnish on teeth to help strengthen them.

MY TOPS TIPS TO REDUCE DECAY IN KIDS:

Supervise toothbrushing twice daily and use a fluoride toothpaste. After brushing don't rinse out with water, just spit the toothpaste out Reduce sugar intake in diet...read labels!! Avoid sugary or fizzy drinks I hope this has been helpful, please feel free to email if you have any questions.