

Healthy People Dental

Eating Habits for a Healthy Smile and Body

Your diet—including what and how often you eat—plays an important role in attaining and maintaining a healthy smile. Candy has long been associated with dental cavities, but your teeth are at risk from more than just candy. Many foods and beverages, particularly those high in added sugar, can set the cavity process in motion.

Caring For Your Teeth and Gums

Dental cavities are caused by a thin film of bacteria called “plaque” that coats your teeth. When you eat or drink the plaque bacteria digest any sugar and produce acids that attack your tooth enamel. The stickiness of plaque keeps these acids in contact with the enamel for some time after you have finished eating or drinking. With repeated and prolonged exposure to these acids, your enamel eventually can wear through, resulting in cavities.

It is important to remove plaque regularly by brushing your teeth twice daily and cleaning between your teeth with floss or another interdental cleaner once a day. If plaque builds up, it can cause swelling and bleeding of the gingival (gum) tissue. Eventually, the hard and soft tissues that hold your teeth in place can be damaged, and you run the risk of losing teeth. You should visit your dentist regularly for a complete oral examination and a professional cleaning.



Diet and Your Dental Health

Attention to your eating habits can reduce your risk of developing cavities. Frequent snacking or sipping on sugar-containing beverages such as soda, juices, sports drinks—even flavored waters—create an environment for decay because it exposes your teeth repeatedly to acid attacks.

Keeping an eye on the amount of sugar in your diet also can help protect your smile. Most foods contain some sugar. For example, fruits and vegetables contain sugars naturally, while other foods have added sugars. You can minimize the risk of developing cavities as a result of consuming sugar by limiting foods with added sugar in your diet. Also, eat sweets as part of a meal rather than as a separate snack. Salivary flow increases more during meals than during snacks. Saliva helps weaken cavity-causing acids and rinses food particles from the mouth.

Chewing gum also stimulates salivary flow. The increased flow adds calcium and phosphate to the saliva, which help strengthen tooth enamel. Chewing sugarless gum for 20 minutes after meals can help prevent tooth decay. Look for the American Dental Association (ADA) Seal of Acceptance when choosing a sugarless gum. The Seal means a product has met the ADA's criteria for safety and effectiveness.

A Balanced Diet

A balanced diet is important to maintain your overall health. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) recommends that you select a mix of foods from the following groups: fruit and vegetables, especially dark green or orange ones; foods made with whole grains, such as whole wheat bread, brown rice or oatmeal; milk products, such as low-fat yogurt or low-fat cheese; beans and meats, such as chicken, fish or lean beef; oils, such as cooking oils or oils found in nuts and some types of fish.

You can learn more about the USDA recommendations and find suggestions for developing a healthy lifestyle on its web site. The ADA's web site offers a wealth of information about healthy smiles and dental care. You can visit ADA at www.ada.org for more information.

Healthy Mouth Recipe

Pumpkin Spiced Oatmeal Pecan Cookies

Ingredients:

1 cup all purpose flour
2 cups quick oats
1 tsp baking powder
1/2 tsp baking soda
1/2 tsp salt
1/2 tsp ground cinnamon
2 tsp pumpkin pie spice
2 tbsp. unsalted butter, room temperature
1/2 cup sugar
1/2 cup unpacked brown sugar
1 large egg
6 tbsp. canned pumpkin (not pumpkin pie filling)
2 tsp vanilla extract
3/4 cup chopped pecans

Directions:

Preheat oven to 350°; line two baking sheets with parchment paper.

In a medium bowl, whisk together flour, oats, baking powder, baking soda, salt, pumpkin spice and cinnamon. In a large bowl, with a mixer, cream together the butter and the sugars on medium speed. Add the egg, followed by the pumpkin and vanilla extract. Working by hand, stir in the flour mixture and the oats until just combined and no streaks of flour remain; stir in the pecans. Drop 1 tablespoon of the dough at a time onto prepared baking sheets. Bake for about 10-12 minutes, or until cookies become light brown at the edges. Makes 32 cookies.

