

TOOTH DECAY PREVENTION

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Tooth decay is a progressive disease resulting in the interaction of bacteria that naturally occur on the teeth and sugars in the everyday diet. Sugar causes a reaction in the bacteria, causing them to produce acids that break down the mineral in teeth, forming a cavity. Dentists remove the decay and fill the tooth using a variety of fillings, restoring the tooth to a healthy state. Nerve damage can result from severe decay and may require a crown (a crown is like a large filling that goes over the tooth to cap it, making it stronger by covering it). Avoiding unnecessary decay simply requires strict adherence to a dental hygiene regimen: brushing and flossing twice a day, regular dental check-ups, diet control and fluoride treatment. Practicing good hygiene avoids unhealthy teeth and costly treatment.

Sealants

The grooves and depressions that form the chewing surfaces of the back teeth are extremely difficult (if not impossible) to clean of bacteria and food. As the bacteria reacts with the food, acids form and break down the tooth enamel, causing cavities. Recent studies indicate that 88 percent of total cavities in American school children are caused this way.

Tooth sealants protect these susceptible areas by sealing the grooves and depressions, preventing bacteria and food particles from residing in these areas. Sealant material is a resin typically applied to the back teeth (molars and premolars) and areas prone to cavities. It lasts for several years but needs to be checked during regular appointments and occasionally replaced.



Fluoride

Fluoride is a substance that helps teeth become stronger and resistant to decay. Regularly drinking water treated with fluoride and brushing and flossing regularly ensures significantly lower cavities. Dentists can evaluate the level of fluoride in a primary drinking water source and recommend fluoride supplements (usually in tablets or drops), if necessary.



Diet Control

The teeth, bones and soft tissues of the mouth require a healthy, well-balanced diet. A variety of foods from the five food groups help minimize and avoid cavities and other dental problems. Consumption of foods that contain sugars and starches should be decreased. These foods can include candies, cookies, chips and crackers. Healthier foods, such as vegetables, low-fat yogurt and cheeses, help promote stronger teeth.

Dental Visits

You should visit your dentist twice a year (about once every six months). In order to maintain a healthy smile, it is vital to have professional cleanings and regular check-ups. Your dentist will examine your teeth and provide an evaluation of existing dental problems and proposed treatment. If you have a dental emergency, you should call your dentist immediately.