

# WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT ORAL HEALTH AND NUTRITION

**G**ood nutrition is essential for good health and that includes the health of your teeth. Learn more about the link between your diet and your oral health.



## How does my diet affect my oral health?

Tooth decay and cavities are caused by acid that is produced by interactions between oral bacteria and food deposits left on your teeth. Certain foods, especially sugary, starchy and sticky snacks, are linked to higher levels of such acid-causing bacteria. Additionally, poor nutrition can weaken your immune system and make you more susceptible to other health problems, including gum disease.

## How can I maintain good nutrition?

Variety and moderation are the keys to a healthful diet. Eat well-balanced meals, choosing a variety of options from the five major food groups: fruits, vegetables, grains, dairy products and protein. Limiting or eliminating one of these groups can lead to vitamin or mineral deficiencies.

## Which vitamins and minerals are important for oral health?

Your teeth and jaws are made mostly of calcium, which helps protect and rebuild your tooth enamel. Not getting enough calcium puts you at risk for gum disease and tooth decay, so make sure to eat calcium-rich foods such

as beans, greens, milk, yogurt and cheese. In addition to providing you with calcium, research has shown that dairy products also may help reduce your risk of cavities.

## What should I know about vitamins A and D?

Vitamin D (found in milk, eggs and fish) also is an important nutrient because it helps your body to absorb calcium. A vitamin D deficiency can lead to burning mouth syndrome, a painful condition in which patients feel a scalding sensation in the tongue, lips, palate or throughout the mouth. To further protect your enamel, eat foods containing phosphorous (such as meat, poultry, fish, milk and eggs) and vitamin A (such as sweet potatoes, liver and spinach).

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## What should I know about vitamin C?

Vitamin C (found in oranges, grapefruit, strawberries, kiwi, and red and green peppers) promotes healthy gums and quick healing of wounds. A severe lack of it could result in bleeding gums or loose teeth. Other nutrients that promote oral health include vitamin B3 (found in chicken and fish), vitamins B2 and B12 (found in pasta, bagels, spinach and almonds) and iron (found in liver, red meat, bran cereal and nuts).

## What should I know about dietary supplements?

If you don't have a well-balanced diet, you may decide to take a multivitamin as a way to fill the nutritional gap. Many people take one or more dietary supplements daily with the goal of improving their overall health. Popular dietary supplements include vitamins, minerals, herbs and botanicals, amino acids and enzymes. Supplements come in many forms, such as tablets, capsules and powders, as well as drinks and energy bars. Most of these supplements can be bought at grocery or drug stores without a prescription.

However, some dietary supplements may interfere with the treatment or medications prescribed by your dentist. Tell your dentist if you are taking dietary supplements to avoid unwanted interactions.