

Tooth Decay

Causes, Treatment, and Prevention

WHAT IS TOOTH DECAY?

Tooth decay is a disease of the mouth that is also known as dental caries or cavities.

There are **systemic (internal)** and **oral (external)** causes that contribute to tooth decay (cavities).

Orally, tooth decay is a result of direct damage to the teeth due to a bacterial imbalance in the mouth (bad bacteria outnumber the good bacteria). After eating or drinking, the acid produced from the bad bacteria attacks and demineralizes the teeth. This demineralization creates holes in the teeth known as cavities.

Systemically, tooth decay is a result of an imbalance of the internal organ systems (gut, thyroid, liver, circulatory, hormones, etc.). This systemic imbalance makes teeth susceptible to the microbial acid attacks in the oral environment. Systemic imbalances may also suppress the immune response which can lead to a higher potential to develop tooth decay.

COMMON SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

PAIN OR SENSITIVITY

CAVITATION (HOLE IN TOOTH)

WHITE, BROWN, or BLACK SPOTS

TOOTH LOSS

Social Impact

92% of adults 20 to 64 have had tooth decay in their permanent teeth, while 26% of the same group have untreated tooth decay.

38% of adults say life is less satisfying due to the condition of their teeth.

Children with poor oral health are 3 times more likely to miss school as a result of dental pain.

1 in 4 adults avoid smiling due to the condition of their teeth.

23% of adults say they feel embarrassment due to the condition of their teeth.

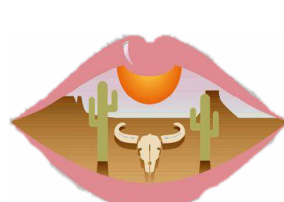
What Are the Primary Causes of Tooth Decay?

Bacterial Imbalance



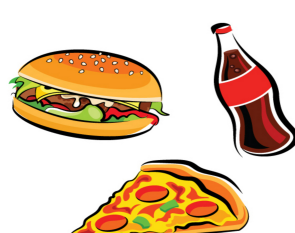
When there is an excessive amount of dental plaque on your teeth and the bad (pathogenic) bacteria outnumber the good bacteria, you become more susceptible to tooth decay. Systemically, when you have underlying conditions like diabetes, you may consequently contribute to an oral imbalance by suppressing your overall immune response.

Poor or Inadequate Saliva Flow (Dry Mouth)



As one of the most important protective factors for teeth, saliva is made of teeth healthy proteins, calcium, phosphates and more. The teeth remineralizing parts of saliva help fight tooth decay and balance mouth pH. Low saliva flow removes all of these protective factors, making you more susceptible to tooth decay.

Poor Diet



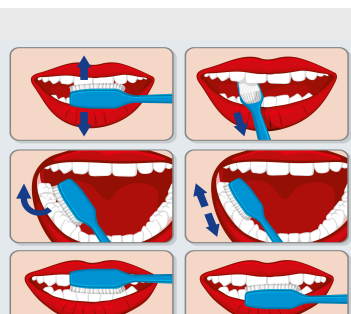
A poor diet is arguably the most important cause of tooth decay. Every time you eat or drink the mouth becomes more acidic. Sugary and high carb foods feed the bacteria that produce the acid that causes tooth decay. Low mouth pH allows the bad bacteria to thrive longer in the mouth, leading to more cavities.

Poor Oral Hygiene

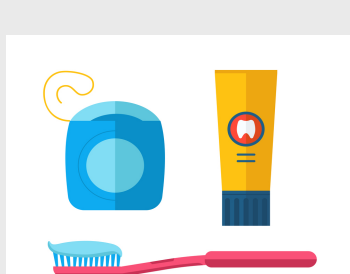


Practicing an effective brushing and flossing routine along with the correct type of products is essential to excellent oral health. Focus on your brushing technique such as the recommended "Bass Method." Then use products with fluoride, xylitol, or other remineralizing agents that will control mouth pH.

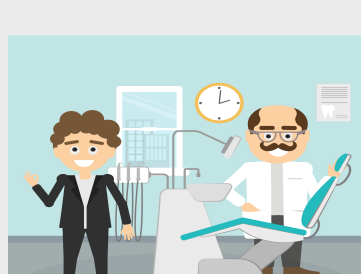
Treatment & Prevention



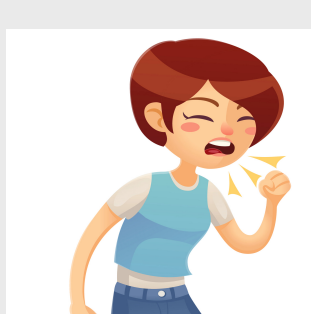
Practice Proper Oral Hygiene Techniques



Smart Dental Product Choices and Proper Use (Soft Brush, Fluoride, Xylitol, etc.)



Visit Your Dentist Twice Per Year



Address Any Systemic Health Conditions or Habits (diabetes, smoking, etc.)



Eat a Healthy, Well-Balanced Diet



Stop Frequent and Long Duration Snacking

Recommendations & Advice

Preventing and healing cavities is a whole-body approach. Addressing the primary risk factors discussed above will give you a significant advantage over being a victim of tooth decay.

It is essential to understand that not all cavities result in sensitivity or pain (toothache). Therefore, always remember to be consciously aware of your oral health condition and hygiene.

If unsure whether you have a cavity, refer to the symptoms and signs above and be quick to address the early signs of the beginning of a cavity.

Always seek the care and consult from your dentist as there is no substitute for professional dental care and advice from your trusted dentist. It is especially important to seek professional dental care if you are experiencing pain anywhere in the mouth or notice an infection.

Treat your mouth as part of a complex system with no single approach to defeating tooth decay. Appreciating and understanding how your mouth interacts with the other systems in your body will enable you to effectively treat and prevent tooth decay for a lifetime.

Sources:
1. <https://www.nidcr.nih.gov/DataStatistics/FindDataByTopic/DentalCaries/DentalCariesAdults20to64.htm>
2. <http://www.ada.org/hpi>
3. Balance: A Guide for Managing Dental Caries. Dr. Kim Kutsch and Robert Bowers. 2012.

©2020 Copyright Winslow DDS Inc.
All rights reserved.