

# A Reason To Smile



Brush up on how to protect your mouth to keep you and your family smiling. Did you know your regular diet and habits could be having a significant effect on your teeth? You may not realize it, but many foods and beverages harm your oral health, while others protect your teeth and mouth.

## Sugar

When the bacteria in your mouth break down sugars, they produce acid that can erode enamel and cause tooth decay. Sugary beverages like sodas, sports drinks, and fruit juices can be particularly harmful, as we tend to sip on these, allowing the sugar to build up in our mouths over time.

## Citrus

Citrus fruits and juices, like grapefruit, orange juice, and lemonade are high in acidity, which breaks down enamel and leaves your teeth susceptible to decay.

## Alcohol

Alcohol decreases your saliva production, which can lead to tooth decay and gum disease. Heavy alcohol use also increases your risk for mouth cancer.

## Tobacco

Tobacco, whether from smoking or chewing, stains your teeth and drastically increases your risk of gum disease and oral cancers.

## Water

In most of the United States, tap water is enriched with fluoride, which remineralizes teeth.

## Dairy

Milk, plain yogurt, and cheese are a few dairy foods that are low in sugar and acidity, but high in calcium, which helps keep bones and teeth strong. They also contain casein, a protein that fortifies the tooth's surface.

## Fruit & Veggies

Raw fruits and vegetables like celery and pears are high in fiber, which helps keep your mouth clean by producing an abundance of saliva. The crisp textures of these foods also help to wipe away plaque-causing bacteria on your teeth. Just beware of dried fruits – while they may seem healthy, dried fruits contain a concentrated amount of sugar and stick to your teeth.

## Vitamin C

Foods like red peppers and sweet potatoes are high in Vitamin C, which helps keep gums healthy and prevents gingivitis. Citrus fruits like oranges are also high in Vitamin C, but be aware of their acidity.

## But let's be real...

Of course, it would be unrealistic to stop eating sugary and acidic foods altogether to avoid poor dental health. Instead, limit your intake and consume these foods in moderation. It is also recommended that you clean your mouth regularly to block the build up of sugars and acids on your teeth. Follow these four recommendations to keep your smile sparkling:

1. Brush twice daily
2. Floss at least once a day
3. See your dentist for a cleaning twice a year
4. Replace your toothbrush 3-4 times per year



Sources: American Dental Association: [www.ada.org](http://www.ada.org); Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)