

Tooth Decay



What is tooth decay?

Tooth decay is caused by germs that live in a sticky film on teeth called plaque. The germs eat sugar and make an acid that eats away at your tooth and can lead to tooth decay called cavities. Unless the tooth decay is caught early, it can only be fixed by a dentist drilling and filling the cavity.

What is plaque?

Plaque is a sticky film on your teeth where germs called bacteria live. It forms every day on your teeth and is removed by brushing your teeth. It can be hard to see because it is the same color as your teeth. When teeth you do not brush your teeth for a long time, plaque can build up and look like a yellowish-brown stain.

Where do the germs (bacteria) that live in plaque come from?

The germs that live in plaque and cause tooth decay are passed from a child's caregiver (usually the mother) to the child. This can happen by sharing spoons when feeding, cleaning off pacifiers with your mouth, and even kissing. You should use your own spoon to test foods and clean off your child's pacifiers with water. This will help the bacteria that live in your mouth from being passed to your child.

What do the germs (bacteria) in plaque do?

The germs that live in plaque are called bacteria. Bacteria eat sugar and then make an acid they release into your mouth. A very small amount of sugar is enough for plaque bacteria to make acid. The germs eat sugar and make an acid that eats away at your tooth and can lead to tooth decay called cavities. Eating or drinking sugary beverages – such as soda pop and juice - between meals makes bacteria produce more acid and the faster your teeth can decay. Serve sugary foods or beverages during meal times only.

Can tooth decay be prevented? Can I stop plaque from forming?

Yes! Tooth decay is 100% preventable! Tooth decay and cavities can be prevented in your child's teeth by brushing teeth twice per day with toothpaste that has fluoride. The brushing breaks plaque apart and helps remove it from your teeth. For children under two, use a very small smear of toothpaste no bigger than grain of rice. For children over two, you may use a pea size amount of toothpaste. Ask your doctor or dentist for more information.

Why is it important to use fluoride?

Fluoride makes teeth stronger and helps prevent tooth decay. Child should also drink tap water which contains the right fluoride to help your teeth. Use bottled water that has added fluoride or is labeled "nursery" water. Check with your doctor or dentist to make sure you and your child are receiving the right amount of fluoride.

Remember: Tooth Decay is 100% Preventable!

Stop tooth decay by:

1. If you put your child to bed with a bottle, only fill it with tap water. No milk, juice or other sugary beverages in bottles at nighttime or during naps.
2. Brushing your teeth and your child's teeth at least twice a day with toothpaste that has fluoride.
3. Cleaning off pacifiers with water and use your own spoon to test food
4. Eating healthy foods and eating foods or drinks that have sugar only at meal times.
5. Drinking tap water or bottled water with fluoride.
6. Visiting the doctor and dentist regularly