



## DIETARY ADVICE FOR PARENTS

### Patient Advice

## SUGAR AND REFINED CARBOHYDRATES

Contrary to popular belief decay has been shown **not** to be related to the total amount of sugar eaten **or** how often a child brushes their teeth.

**Decay** is related to the **total length of time** that sugar is present in the mouth. For example, if a child were to eat a bag of sugar immediately after lunch and have no other sugar in their diet, it would be unlikely that they would get tooth decay. However, if a child were to eat two packets of 'Polos' spread throughout each day their teeth would rapidly show signs of decay because sugar is in the mouth for longer. Brushing does not stop tooth decay except if fluoride is present in toothpaste.

### SWEETS

Any sweet, food or drink that stays in the mouth for a long period of time can and will cause decay in children.

- Examples of these 'tooth-killers' are mints, Polos, toffees, lollipops, sherbet, boiled sweets and chews. These should be avoided if you want your child to be decay free.
- Chocolate-based confectionery is in the mouth for a comparatively short time and will do less damage than hard sweets.
- Chewing gum encourages saliva to be produced and is not harmful for teeth.
- Sugar-free mints or hard sweets contain an artificial sweetener called xylitol, which is a mild laxative, so use with caution.
- 'Diet' products are often sweetened with aspartame that can cause hypersensitivity in some people.

Bearing this in mind a healthy child can eat anything you wish them to have with meals, including a dessert, but should have no snacks or have only sugar-free snacks in-between meals. Sugar is found in many ordinary foods we eat as well as the obvious ones such as sweets, cakes and biscuits.

- Examples of snacks that are non-damaging are cheese, nuts, bananas, carrots, meat and vegetables.
- Snacks that are only moderately damaging are potato crisps, fruit and bread.

### DRINKS

Drinks can be harmful in exactly the same way as food, and any drink containing sugar or acid consumed regularly will damage the teeth.

- Examples of drinks that are not damaging are water, milk, and sugar-free tea.
- Sugar-free drinks and squashes often contain other ingredients that may damage teeth i.e. fruit acids or varieties of sugar (glucose, syrup, molasses, honey etc.) They will also contain other chemicals that may not be harmful to teeth but you may not want your child to have i.e. tartazine, aspartame, preservatives, colourings etc.

## KEY POINTS

- **Sugars or sweets present in the mouth for long periods cause decay.**
- **Acids can soften teeth and make them more prone to decay.**
- **Reduce the time sugar is in the mouth by sticking to set meal times and avoid sugar between meals. Snacks should be sugar free.**
- **Any hard sweets eaten in quantity will eventually cause decay.**
- **Children should eat a balanced diet.**
- **Brush teeth twice daily for healthy gums.**
- **Decay develops much faster in children so regular examinations are essential.**



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- Fizzy or carbonated drinks including sparkling water are all acidic. They will make the teeth more susceptible to decay, wear and sensitivity. A sensible upper limit would be in the order of four cans per week!
- Lucozade and 'sport' drinks contain very high levels of sugar combined with some salt and are damaging to teeth.
- Blackcurrant drinks have been labelled as very bad in the past, primarily because they used to be given undiluted in special dummies. It led to an aggressive form of decay affecting the front teeth, called 'bottle decay', and would turn these teeth black. It is however no different from other sugared drinks.
- 'Tooth-Kind' drinks have no added sugar and are balanced so that they are not acidic. They will contain some fruit sugars and artificial sweeteners.

### ACID

Acid in food and drinks does not cause decay but softens the teeth and makes them more likely to be damaged by sugar, become sensitive or eroded away.

- Examples of acid food and drinks are: all fizzy drinks (including diet drinks and sparkling water), fruit, fruit juices and natural yoghurt. It is not wrong or bad to have any of these foods but everything including fruit should be consumed in moderation as part of a balanced diet.
- Highly acidic foods are; Oranges, vinegar, pickles, grapes, lemons, grapefruits and fromage frais.

### BRUSHING

Brushing, except with toothpaste containing fluoride, has been shown to play **no part in the level of decay**. Teeth are brushed to control gum disease, to keep the teeth clean and reduce bad odours.

- Teeth should be brushed twice daily, after breakfast and after the last meal of the day.
- If your child has a diet high in acid foods or suffers from sensitivity, teeth should be brushed **before** meals, and the teeth rinsed with water afterwards.

### FLUORIDE

No fluoride is added to the water in Kent. Fluoride will reduce the level of decay in children but dietary measures will always be more effective than use of fluoride.

High levels of fluoride, cause a white mottling or staining of the teeth, thus childrens' toothpaste contain lower levels of fluoride to counter possible swallowing.

### GENERAL DIETARY ADVICE

Children should have a balanced diet. This means a combination of the following

- **Carbohydrates** Potatoes, rice, bread, pasta, cereals and pulses.
- **Vegetables and Fruit** The recommendation is for five small portions of vegetables and fruit per day!
- **Protein** Meat, fish, eggs and cheese.

Children do not need a high fibre diet. Their digestive system is not fully developed and they will not be able to handle the throughput of bran and other high fibre foods. They do need some fibre, but a combination of carbohydrate, vegetables and fruit will be sufficient to supply all the fibre they need.

They do not need a low-fat diet. They are actively developing and growing consuming vast amounts of energy. Carbohydrates, desserts and protein in a balanced diet can supply all the energy they need.

Childhood habits will continue into adult habits and good patterns should be established for the rest of their life.