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The Best Foods and Drinks for Kids' Oral Health

A child's diet can have a direct effect on his or her health, particularly oral health. Learn more about which foods and drinks are good for your child's oral health—and which aren't so great.

Which foods and drinks promote good oral health?

There are many healthy, nutrient-rich foods and drinks that children can eat to help with their oral and overall health. These foods and drinks contain vitamins and minerals that help kids stay healthy and strong—and keep their teeth and mouths in great shape, too!

Calcium

Teeth and jaws are made mostly of calcium, and they need lots of it to stay healthy. If children don't eat or drink enough calcium, they risk developing gum disease and tooth decay. Calcium-rich foods and drinks include: milk (soy milk and cow's milk); yogurt and cheese; cooking greens (collards, spinach, kale, okra); and beans (soy beans, white beans).

Iron

Iron helps improve your child's brain development, and fights against anemia. It also helps prevent tongue inflammation and sores that may form inside the mouth. Great iron-rich food choices include: red meat (beef, pork, lamb); beans (chickpeas, lentils, soy beans); and iron-fortified, low-sugar cereal.

Vitamin C

Consuming foods and drinks with vitamin C is essential for children—and adults, too. Too little makes it harder for wounds and cuts to heal. It also can affect oral health, causing bleeding gums. Provide your children with fresh fruits and vegetables to ensure they are consuming enough vitamin C. Opt for these healthy food choices: oranges, sweet potatoes, red peppers, strawberries, kiwi, and broccoli.

Which foods and drinks should my children avoid?

There are a few foods and drinks that you should try to avoid giving your children because they have harmful effects on their oral health.

Sugar

Consuming too many sugary snacks can cause tooth decay. Your children should avoid, or sparingly consume, the following: cookies, cakes, candy, gum, sports drinks, and fruit juices.

Carbohydrates

It's sometimes surprising that carbohydrates are harmful to teeth, but eating them causes bacteria to stay on the teeth, which produces acid and may cause decay. Avoid these foods, or feed them to your children in moderation: chips, bread, pasta, crackers, and pretzels.



Carbonated drinks

Both regular (sugar-added) and diet sodas are very harmful to teeth. The carbonation in soft drinks wears away the enamel on the teeth, causing them to become weak and susceptible to staining. Offer your children milk or water instead of carbonated drinks.

It can be difficult to help children learn the best foods and drinks to keep their mouths healthy, but starting early is the best way to ensure your children have great oral and overall health. Talk to your dentist and pediatrician about the best ways to incorporate healthy foods and drinks into your child's diet.



KnowYourTeeth.com

Brought to you by the Academy of General Dentistry (AGD), this website answers important dental health questions, offers the latest information on current treatments, provides tips for first-rate oral hygiene, and helps visitors find highly qualified general dentists near where they live.

The AGD is a member of the Partnership for Healthy Mouths, Healthy Lives, a first-of-its-kind national dental coalition composed of 35 leading dental health organizations. Look for more information about the Kids' Healthy Mouths campaign at www.2min2x.org.

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