

## **Nutrition Dos and Don'ts for Oral Health**

Have you ever thought about the role nutrition plays in the health of your teeth and gums? Most people think about sugar, but not everyone thinks about how their food choices (and even meal timing) affects their oral health.

Let's take a look at some Dos and Don'ts for nutrition and how you can make better choices to improve your smile.

### **Do Make a Plan**

Planning for your meals and snacks ahead of time is not only good for your mouth, but it's good for your waistline. Being prepared helps you avoid unhealthy trips to vending machines and hasty food choices when hunger strikes. Crunchy fruits like apples and pears are a good choice for snacks due to their high water content, which neutralizes the sugars a bit and helps minimize damage to the teeth.

### **Don't Sip Sugary Beverages**

The American Dental Association has done studies that have found that most of our sugar intake comes in liquid form. This means soft drinks, energy drinks, and sports drinks. When you sip casually on these drinks rather than drink them in one sitting, the sugar attacks your teeth for hours at a time. So try to finish your beverage with your meal.

### **Do Choose Fresh Foods**

Any type of fresh or unprocessed food is not only great for your body, but will stimulate your salivary glands. Saliva helps neutralize acid and wash away some of the bacteria that leads to plaque, tartar, and cavities. Some good food choices include fresh fruits and vegetables, high quality proteins like meats, eggs, cheese, fish, and beans, and whole grain breads and cereals that are low in sugar.

### **Don't Consume Added Sugars**

Added sugars or natural sweeteners are bad for your teeth and also contribute to obesity. If you look at the ingredient list, anything that ends with "-ose" like fructose or sucrose generally indicates the presence of a natural sweetener. These substances will harm your teeth just like regular sugar does.

### **Do Use Sugar Substitutes Instead**

Products like saccharin, Equal (aspartame) and Splenda are actually ok for your teeth because they aren't digested in the same way as sugar, so they don't produce any bacteria in the mouth. Just be sure to check the product you are eating or drinking to make sure there are no other added sweeteners that could be harmful.

### **Don't Skip Breakfast**

Starting your day off with more calories and ending your day on the lighter side often works better to control hunger and cut back on snacking. Snacks will naturally expose the teeth to acid more often, which ups their risk of decay. So if you must skip breakfast, try to limit unhealthy snacks as much as possible.

### **Do Consume Dairy, Meat, and Nuts**

Foods like cheese, milk, chicken, meat, and nuts contain calcium and phosphorus. These substances help protect and rebuild tooth enamel and also have the added benefit of strengthening your bones. Just be sure to consume them in moderation, as they can be high in calories and saturated fat.