

Your Teeth and Their Care



Your teeth do more than chew food. They make your smile look nice. They also help you talk. They even help shape your face. Teeth are most important, though for chewing. Your teeth grind the food you eat into smaller pieces so that it can be easier digested.

As you eat, however, left over bits of food and bacteria can stick to your teeth. The bacteria are a part of a sticky film on your teeth called plaque. Bacteria in plaque break down sugars in food to form acids. The acids can make holes called cavities, in the outer layers of your teeth.

Cavities can get larger and larger until they reach deep inside a tooth. The process of forming cavities is called tooth decay. Decay means to rot. If the cavity reaches the dentin layer, bacteria can travel through it into the tooth's pulp. Nerves in the pulp may swell with infection, causing pain. If the tooth is not treated in time, it can die.

Plaque can cause problems for your gums, too. If plaque is left on teeth, it hardens and becomes tartar. Tartar rubs against gums and can make them bleed. This can lead to infection that destroys the bone that holds the teeth in place. Serious gum disease can cause even healthy teeth to fall out.

Preventing Tooth Problems

1. Avoid sugary and sticky snacks. Milk products and fruits help build strong food.
2. Floss once a day.
3. Brush your teeth at least twice a day. Rinse your mouth with water after meals when you can't brush.
4. Visit the dentist often for regular cleaning and checkups. He or she may also apply sealants to protect the teeth or fluoride to strengthened them. Fluoride is a mineral that helps prevents cavities.

Questions

Use a word from the word box that best complete each sentence.

plaque tartar cavities fluoride decay grind

1. Acids from various food can make holes in the teeth called _____.
2. The process of forming cavities is called tooth _____, which also means to rot.
3. Bacteria are a part of a sticky natural film on the teeth called _____.
4. Your teeth _____ food into smaller pieces making easier for digestion.
5. Plaque left on the teeth can harden and become _____.
6. _____ in a mineral that help prevents cavities.

Answer each question in a complete sentence where necessary.

7. What are two functions of the teeth? (2)

8. What is an effect of tartar rubbing against gums? (2)

9. What are two things that can be done to prevent tooth problems? (2)

