

February is Dental Health Month!

We all know that sugar is the main enemy in the war against cavities. But the culprits aren't just candy, cookies and cake. Most foods contain some kind of sugar, including milk, fruits, some vegetables, and even that time-tested kid favorite, peanut butter. In addition, starch – which lurks in pretzels, potato chips, crackers, bread and pasta, among other places – has also been found to promote tooth decay.

Banning all foods is not the answer. Knowing what to serve and when to serve them is the key to good dental health.

It turns out that timing is everything. In fact, feeding children carbohydrates – whether in the form of sugar or starch – at the right time can help guard against tooth decay. A food with sugar or starch will not linger as long on the teeth if it is eaten with a meal, as the saliva and water or milk served with the meal helps wash it away. In addition, choosing healthier snacks will lead to fewer cavities and better dental health.

According to the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, following these dietary tips could help keep your kids' mouths healthy:

- **Discuss dental health with children**; explain what cavities are, why they are not healthy, and what causes them; teach them how to make the right food choices for their teeth.
- **Offer a variety of fruit and vegetables snacks**. The best are pears, melons, celery and cucumbers due to high water content.
- **Limit fruits with concentrated sugar**, such as bananas and raisins. Encourage brushing after eating these snacks.
- **Serve cheese**. Not only is cheese nutritionally sound, it triggers the flow of saliva, which helps wash food particles away from teeth.
- **Avoid gooey and sticky foods** such as fruit leather, raisins, caramel, honey, molasses and syrup. These foods all stick to the teeth, making it hard for saliva to wash away. Encourage brushing right after eating foods like this.
- **Serve sugary treats right after a meal rather than as a snack** so that saliva and drinks served with the meal rinse food particles away.
- **Avoid foods that allow sugar to linger on the teeth**. Hard candy, lollipops, gum and sugary soft drinks all coat the teeth with sugar and allow it to stay there for extended periods of time.

- Offer milk or water instead of juice and soda.
- Don't put a baby to bed with a bottle of milk, formula or juice, as any liquid in the mouth feeds bacteria that produce acids that cause decay.
- Encourage frequent brushing. Use a fluoride toothpaste and mouthwash every day, and brush at least twice a day.

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