

A close-up photograph of a young man and an elderly man smiling together. The young man is on the left, and the elderly man is on the right, wearing a brown cap and a colorful striped scarf. The background is bright and slightly blurred.

3M Science.
Applied to Life.™

**Cavity
prevention
doesn't have
an age limit.**

Patient information

What are cavities?

Cavities are small spots of tooth decay that if left to develop, can cause pain and other health issues – and are among the world’s most common health problems.¹ But how exactly do they form?

What are teeth made of?



You know your teeth are important. They help you eat, speak and smile – but did you know they’re made of minerals?

Teeth are made of calcium, phosphate and other minerals, and are actually stronger than bone!

But that doesn’t mean they’re invincible.

What causes tooth decay?

While eating too much candy or drinking sugary drinks certainly isn’t healthy for teeth, sugar itself isn’t to blame for tooth decay.

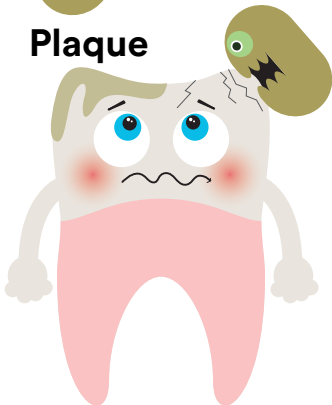
Cavities happen when the bacteria in your mouth react with the sugars and acids in the food you eat and accumulate on or between teeth as plaque.



Acids



Plaque



And while candy can cause damage, even healthy foods can produce acid and create plaque.

Over time, plaque produces acids that break down the minerals in teeth, causing cavities and making teeth weaker. The longer plaque hangs around, the more damage it can do.

Timing is everything!

However, it's not just the kind of foods and drinks you consume that could be causing decay – it's how often you snack or sip.

Continually snacking throughout the day exposes your teeth to constant acid and sugar with no time to recover. That's why it's best to eat all at once or follow snacks or sugary drinks with water.



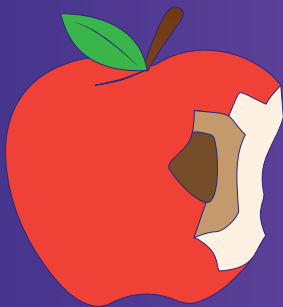
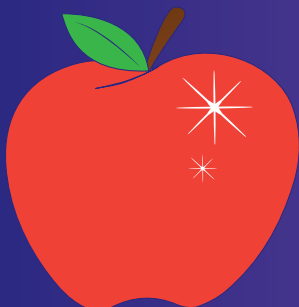
Symptoms of tooth decay:

Unless you've never had a cavity, you probably know what they feel and look like:

- Toothaches
- Staining
- Tooth sensitivity
- Pain when you bite down
- Holes or pits in teeth
- Pain when you eat or drink something sweet, hot or cold.

However, cavities don't just appear – they take time to develop. That's why it's important to visit the dentist regularly, to catch decay before it can get worse and cause pain.

You can think of it as an apple sitting on your kitchen counter. You may not see it going bad from the outside, but if you let it sit for too long, the bruises could turn into rot.



Why should you care?

Beyond being uncomfortable or painful, tooth decay can make it difficult to eat and speak, or lead to broken or lost teeth – all of which can greatly impact your overall quality of life.

However, by maintaining good oral hygiene habits and regularly visiting your dentist, you can not only take care of your teeth – but your overall health.



Nearly
100%

of adults worldwide have had cavities sometime in their lives.²

How do you know if you are at risk for tooth decay and cavities?

Many factors can increase your risk of tooth decay, and it's likely you have more than you think! You may be at a higher risk if you have:

- A high-acid, high-sugar diet
- A history of cavities
- Lost teeth due to cavities
- Orthodontic brackets
- Dry mouth caused by medication or medical conditions
- Inconsistent oral hygiene habits

And if you think you might be at risk, it's time to talk to your dental professional.

How can you prevent cavities?

First things first, talk to your dentist or dental hygienist. They can review your cavity risk level and guide you toward the right prevention routine for you. This could mean changes in your diet, hygiene habits or even medications!

The Australian and New Zealand Dental Associations recommends that most individuals brush for two minutes, twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste but this isn't always enough.



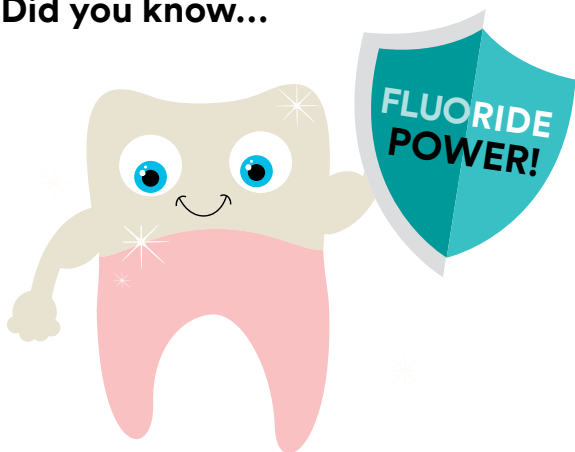
What if I'm at a higher risk of tooth decay?

Your dentist may recommend:

- An in-office, professional fluoride treatment that acts as an extra shield on your teeth.
- A professionally applied sealant to fill deep pits and fissures, especially on your molars, to help lock out decay.
- An at-home, prescription strength fluoride toothpaste. These contain more fluoride than the tubes you find at the supermarket but are used just like regular toothpaste.
- A product containing fluoride, calcium and phosphate – to give your teeth an extra boost of protection.

By covering your bases at the dentist and at home, you can ensure your teeth get the protection they need – regardless of your risk level.

Did you know...



... fluoride is a naturally-occurring mineral found in soil, plants, air and water and is the only mineral proven to help prevent tooth decay.³

¹ Hygiene-related Diseases: Dental Caries (Tooth Decay). Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2016). Available at: https://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/hygiene/disease/dental_caries.html.

² World Health Organisation (WHO) Media Center. Fact sheet #318, April 2012.

³ Weyant, Robert J., et al. "Topical Fluoride for Caries Prevention." The Journal of the American Dental Association 2013; 144(11): 1279–1291.

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