



Nutrition and Your Smile

You've probably heard the saying, "you are what you eat." That might not be exactly true, but it's pretty close. That's because a healthy diet can play a big role in keeping your whole body healthy, including your mouth. In fact, eating nutritious foods can help prevent cavities, tooth decay and gum disease.

Here are some great stats about some of our favorite healthy foods to get you started:

Fruits and vegetables

Fruits and vegetables are high in water and fiber, so they clean your teeth by removing food particles. Crunchy produce like carrots, cucumbers, celery, broccoli, apples and pears are especially good at cleaning your teeth. They stimulate saliva flow to wash away and neutralize acids that attack your teeth, helping protect you from tooth decay and gum disease. In addition, saliva contains calcium and phosphate that helps restore tooth enamel. Dark leafy greens such as spinach and kale are great sources of teeth-strengthening calcium.

Cheese, low-sugar yogurt and other dairy products

The calcium and phosphates in dairy products help your smile. That's because they strengthen teeth by rebuilding enamel and putting minerals back in teeth. Cheese also helps prevent dry mouth and cavities because you produce more saliva when you eat it.

Protein-rich foods

Lean meats, poultry, fish (especially fatty fish like salmon) and eggs all provide plenty of protein and phosphorus — minerals that protect and rebuild tooth enamel.

Nuts

Many kinds of nuts are packed with protein, while some, like peanuts, are also full of vitamin D and calcium that work together to strengthen your teeth. Because they're crunchy, nuts are another food that stimulates teeth-cleaning saliva. Brazil nuts, almonds and cashews help fight bacteria, so they protect against tooth decay.

Whole grains

For more dental health educational resources, go to www.healthysmilelearning.org. Healthy Smile Learning is an outreach effort of Arizona PBS on behalf of the Delta Dental Institute.

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In this video series, kids will learn why certain foods, like pumpkin seeds or beef jerky can be great for their smile. They'll also learn why certain key nutrients, like Vitamin D, is also good for their smile. They'll also learn how to make some fun, mouth-healthy recipes along the way.

As you watch these videos, you can talk with kids about some of their favorite foods. Do any of their favorite foods contain the vitamins and minerals that our mouths crave? You can also pause the videos to explore and look up any words that might be unfamiliar. For example, what does the word "deficiency" mean? Or what does the word "magnesium" mean? How does it affect your body and your mouth?