



# LET'S STOP THE ROT

Join The Fight Against **Tooth Decay**



## Common Causes of Tooth Decay

The number one cause of tooth decay is frequent consumption of sugary foods and drinks.

Without regular brushing and flossing, the bacteria in your mouth, known as dental plaque, converts sugars into acids. Over time, acid eats away at the surface of a tooth, attacking the enamel, weakening the tooth and causing decay in the form of holes or cavities.

The Australian Dental Association says that people should not accept that tooth decay is inevitable as there are a number of easy ways to prevent it altogether.

### Be aware of what you eat and drink:

- Avoid snacking on sugary or acidic foods and drinks between meals. Some foods like muesli and fruit bars might seem healthy, however if they are sugary or have a sticky texture, they may increase your risk of tooth decay
- Opt for safe snacks such as fruits, vegetables, nuts and cheese
- Minimise the acid exposure to your teeth by using a straw when drinking soft drinks, sports drinks and fruit juice
- Eating calcium rich foods like milk, cheese and yogurt can help to neutralise acids and protect your teeth
- Drink plenty of fluoridated water. This maintains healthy saliva and the fluoride helps strengthen tooth enamel.
- Chew sugar-free gum to stimulate saliva after meals – saliva neutralises acids that cause decay

### Maintain good oral hygiene habits:

- Brush your teeth twice a day for two minutes using a fluoride toothpaste. This can reduce your risk of decay by 25%
- Floss your teeth daily

- Visit your dentist regularly for a professional clean and general check-up
- If you live in an area that does not fluoridate tap water or you don't drink fluoridated water, talk to your dentist about fluoride treatments which can help prevent tooth decay

### Your everyday routine may put you at greater risk of tooth decay, without your knowing:

**Dry mouth** – Also known as xerostomia, a dry mouth occurs when there is a lack of saliva in your mouth. Saliva helps to neutralise acid attack on your teeth. Playing active sports can increase your chances of a dry mouth if you become dehydrated because dehydration reduces saliva. If you're playing sport, remember to drink plenty of fluoridated tap water to keep lots of saliva in your mouth

**Medication** – Some medications can encourage tooth decay either because they cause xerostomia or are acidic. These include chewable Vitamin C tablets, frequent use of aspirin, some iron supplements in liquid form, some cough medicines, some types of asthma medication and some anti-depressants. Never stop taking a prescribed medication without consulting with your doctor, but make sure you discuss any medications with your dentist

**Smoking** – Tobacco in cigarettes can damage your teeth and gums. Tooth decay and gum infections are more common in people who smoke. Smoking also reduces the amount of saliva in your mouth, which again puts your teeth at greater risk of decay. Smoking is also a risk factor for oral cancer.

## Dental Factsheet

For more information on oral health and looking after your mouth, visit [www.dentalhealthweek.com.au](http://www.dentalhealthweek.com.au)

Dental Health Week brought to you by the Australian Dental Association Inc. Copyright 2012 ADA All Rights Reserved.

