

Limit Kids' Sweets All Year Round

Halloween isn't the only day to worry about candy and other dental threats to children. Sweet treats can turn a child's mouth into a nightmare 365 days a year. Children face an increased risk for cavities if they eat a lot of sugary foods, such as cookies and candy, and sticky foods, such as toffee and even dried fruit. Drinking a lot of sweet liquids, such as soda and other sweetened drinks, is also part of the recipe for dental problems.

Why are sweets so bad for teeth? Damaging acids form in the mouth every time you eat a sugary snack. These acids continue to affect the teeth for at least 20 minutes before they are neutralized. Sticky foods are more likely to cause cavities because they're not washed away easily by water, milk, or saliva. Limit these foods year-round -- not just for a single night -- and encourage children to brush after eating them.



Do all you can to ensure your child has a healthy, balanced diet. For snacks, give your child nutritious foods such as raw vegetables, plain yogurt, cheese, or a piece of fruit. Instead of sodas, give them milk.

One treat actually helps prevent cavities: sugar-free gum. You can give it to your child to help neutralize the effects of sugary snacks after eating. Gum containing the artificial sweetener xylitol helps fight acids from sugary foods and bacteria in plaque. In addition, the chewing motion stimulates the flow of saliva, which helps cleanse the teeth.

You can also help prevent cavities by making sure kids brush twice a day with a pea-sized portion of fluoride toothpaste and floss once a day. Children should see a dentist as often as the dentist prescribes.

"Diet and Snacking." American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry.
<http://d27vj430nutdmd.cloudfront.net/17243/64402/64402.5.pdf>. Accessed 2013.

"Diet and Dental Health." Mouth Healthy, American Dental Association.
<http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/d/diet-and-dental-health>. Accessed 2013.

"Oral Health: A Window to Your Overall Health." Mayo Clinic.
<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/dental/DE00001>. Accessed 2013.

"Saliva." Mouth Healthy, American Dental Association.
<http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/s/saliva>. Accessed 2013.