



alberta dental
association + college

MEDIA RELEASE

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Fighting the Sugar Wars

Did you know that watching the Olympics can be hazardous to your health? It's a well known fact that TV watchers tend to snack. And those snacks can pose a threat not only to overall health, but to teeth and gums too.

Though candy and baked sweets are obvious culprits: "Sugar is present in most of the food and beverages we ingest, including food like potato chips that contain modified starches," said Dr. Christine Botchway, an Edmonton dentist. "Even healthy snacks like fruit juice and apples contain sugar, so it's important that teeth are cleaned or mouths rinsed with water after eating."

Failure to remove sugars means that the acidity in the mouth is increased for up to two hours after eating sugary food, leaving teeth and gums vulnerable to bacteria. This can result in the enamel of the teeth breaking down and causing cavities.

"The stickiness of the sugared snack is one thing to look out for," said Botchway. "Goosey textures make even a healthy snack like energy bars a suspect as the sugar clings to the crevasses of the teeth until it is brushed away. An even greater danger is the frequency of exposure to sugar. If a person has snacks, fruit juice and other beverages throughout the day, the acid balance could be high for a long time."

North American culture supports a diet of junk food, sugary treats and beverages, and processed food that contains modified starches. Good snacks include cheese, which actually raises the Ph balance, crackers, vegetables and fruit. Crunchy vegetables like carrots and fibrous vegetables like celery actually help to clean and strengthen the teeth. When a craving for sweets overcomes you, look for products containing xylitol, a plant sugar that has been shown to inhibit bacteria and reduce the increase in acidity in the mouth which can reduce tooth decay. This substitute for sucrose is found in some lozenges, chewing gums and cookies.

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Diet is considered one of the causes for the dramatic 30 % rise in early childhood (under age five) cavities. Even a parent concerned about good nutrition may put a child to bed with a bottle of milk or juice, and that may cause cavities as well. Dentists advise parents to begin an oral care routine for their child even before the first tooth erupts (wiping the gums with a clean cloth or swab after every feeding) and to start brushing their children's teeth as soon as the first tooth appears. Parents should continue these cleanings until children can do a thorough job of brushing on their own, usually about age eight. It is recommended that the first annual visit to the dentist should occur before age one.

Reducing the frequency of snacks reduces the risk of cavities and also a parent's work. Wherever possible, don't let children eat sugary snacks. "Good nutrition and oral health habits are instilled between the ages of one and six," said Dr. Botchway. "So starting your baby off early goes a long way in preventing cavities in children and teens."

If your teenager is over indulging in junk food or careless with brushing and flossing, they can be reminded that bacteria in the mouth causes bad breath (halitosis) as well as cavities – not the best way to attract the attention of the opposite sex. Because teens may be away from home for long stretches and reluctant to brush at school or work, rinsing the mouth with water or a fluoride rinse after eating is helpful. Adults should practice similar good habits if they want to avoid cavities and other problems.

For further information on oral health and good nutrition, talk to your dentist or go to the Alberta Dental Association and College website www.abda.ab.ca.

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Good Food, Healthy Teeth

Healthy food is good for your general health and your oral health. The nutrients that come from healthy foods help you to fight cavities and gum disease.

Sugars in Food

Sugar is one of the main causes of oral health problems and is found in many foods. Foods high in sugar include soft drinks, chocolate bars, pastries and baked goods. Ingredients such as corn syrup, dextrose, fructose-glucose, honey, maple syrup, molasses and sucrose are all different types of sugar. Many healthy foods such as milk, dried fruit, bread, cereal and pasta also contain some sugars. The sugars found in healthy foods give our bodies the energy we need to live. The problem is that all of these sugars can cause cavities and other oral health problems.

How Sugars Cause Cavities

Cavities begin with plaque. Plaque is an invisible film that occurs naturally in your mouth and sticks firmly to your teeth. It contains bacteria (germs) and forms on your teeth every day. These bacteria are normal and mostly harmless. They become a problem when the plaque is not cleaned from your teeth by brushing and flossing and are allowed to buildup on and between your teeth. Here's how: When sugars in the foods that you eat mix with the bacteria in the plaque, this makes a mild acid. This acid forms in the plaque and eats away at the hard outer layer of a tooth, called the enamel. Over time, the enamel gets soft and a cavity forms.

Alberta Dental Association and College (ADA+C)

The Alberta Dental Association and College is the professional provincial organization that registers dentists, and it advances the oral health of Albertans through safe, available, affordable, ethical and quality dental services.

Founded in 1906, the Alberta Dental Association and College continues to provide:

- leadership to the dental profession on professional regulations, standards, continuing education and member services
- protection of the public through licensing, standards, monitoring and the resolution of problems
- information and services that encourage improved oral health and demonstrate the link between oral health and overall health
- opportunities to develop collaborative relationships with the public, government, industry and other health professionals on initiatives or in the development of oral health related policy.

Membership in ADA+C is mandatory for any dentist practicing in Alberta, and dentists are obligated to adhere to provincial laws and regulations such as the Alberta Health Professions Act, the Alberta Health Information Act and other applicable legislation.