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Facts on Food

▲ Children's dental health depends less on *what* they eat and more on *how often* they eat it. **Frequency** is the important concept. If a child is going to eat six chocolate cookies, it is preferable to eat these cookies all in one sitting, rather than to eat one cookie each hour for six hours straight.

▲ The **stickiness** or **consistency** of a particular food item is another important concept. This relates to how fast a food item is **cleared** from the tooth surface. The most simple example is a glass of soda versus the chocolate cookies. Once the soda is swallowed, saliva is produced, and the *acid attack* is completed. In contrast, because the cookies remain in the grooves of the teeth for such an extended period of time, there is a potential for more harm.

▲ About 90 percent of all foods contain sugars or starches that enable bacteria in dental plaque to produce acids. This attack by bacterial acid, lasting 20 minutes or more, can lead to loss of tooth mineral and to cavities.

▲ Cooked starches (fermentable carbohydrates) can lead to cavities just as sugars can. In fact, such cooked starches as breads, crackers, pasta, pretzels and potato chips frequently take longer to clear the mouth than sugars. So the decay risk may last even longer.

▲ **Snacks**, served no more than three or four times a day, should contribute to the overall nutrition and health of the child. Some healthy snacks are: cheese, vegetables, yogurt, peanut butter and chocolate milk.

▲ The bacteria levels in the mouth can't tell the difference between the amount of sugar or starch in food. For example, a lick of frosting can start the same acid attack as eating a whole cake.

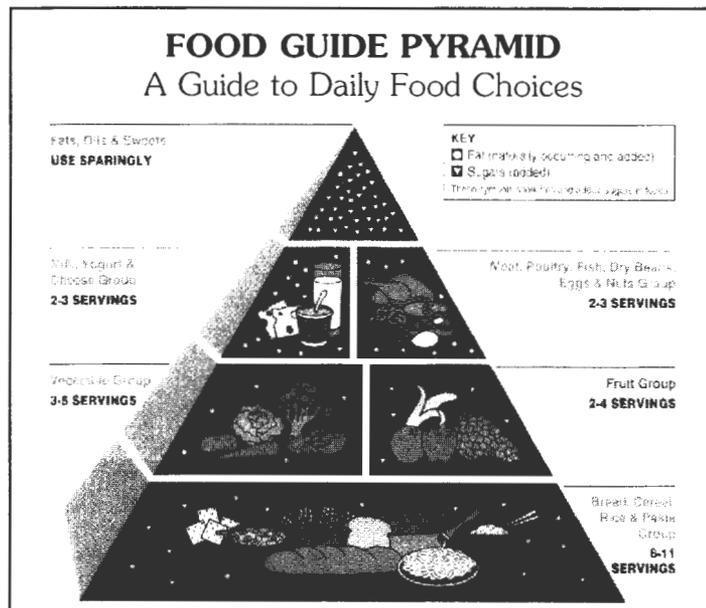
Diet and Dental Health

Snack Attack

What you eat and how often you eat can affect the rate of tooth decay. Sugar and starch are found in a variety of foods and drinks. For example, sugar is present in many foods, including those that are often thought of as healthy snacks, such as fruits, vegetables, milk and juice. Starches also are found in fruits and vegetables, as well as in cereal, cake, bread, and in many processed foods.

Although many of these foods provide the daily nutrients a body needs, frequent between-meal snacking can be harmful. Keep in mind that hard candy, breath mints and cough drops generally stay in the mouth for long periods. During this time, teeth are continuously attacked by acids. Limiting the number of treats will reduce acid attacks.

Foods that are often eaten as part of a meal may pose less of a threat to your teeth. This is because additional saliva is produced during mealtime, which helps to neutralize acid production and clears food from the mouth. Some research indicates that certain foods, such as cheese, peanuts, or sugar-free chewing gum may help to counter the effects of acid attacks.



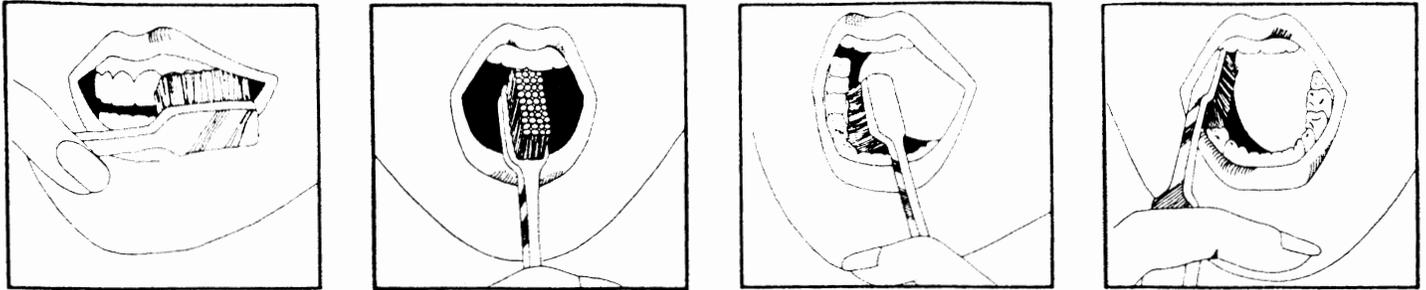
Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture/U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

This guide classifies foods into five major food groups – breads, cereals and other grain products; fruits; vegetables; meat, poultry, fish and alternates; and milk, cheese and yogurt. Each day you should choose at least the minimum number of servings from each of these groups.

Basic brushing techniques to remember:

1. Tilt your child's head back into your lap.
2. Using water alone on the brush will remove the plaque (red stain); however, if child will tolerate it, a small amount of toothpaste with fluoride is preferable.
3. Place brush at an angle to get both tooth and gum surfaces; with a back and forth motion, brush the inside surfaces and proceed to the outside. Brush the chewing/biting surfaces where food and plaque trap.
4. Remember to brush your child's teeth daily - especially at night when plaque multiplies quickly and cavities form.

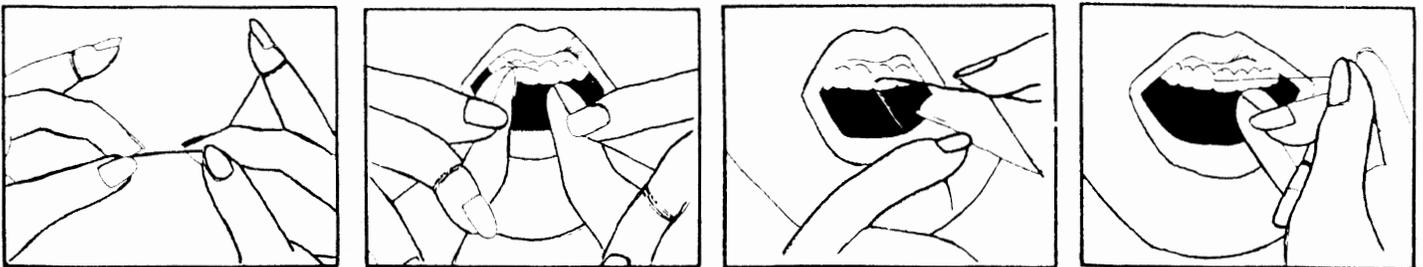
Note: Any toothpaste with the seal of the A.D.A. is fine to use for your child. Any soft toothbrush is acceptable.



Flossing:

1. Flossing is important for those older patients who are not having any difficulty with brushing.
2. Parents are encouraged to floss younger children's teeth only if the teeth are close together, particularly the back teeth where food traps and baby molar teeth remain until age 10 or 11.

Note: If your child's gums bleed upon brushing and flossing, this is an indication that the teeth and gums need to be brushed and flossed more often by the parent.



Fluoride:

In general, the fluoride in toothpaste, fluoride in the water supply, and the fluoride treatments given at the office provide adequate fluoride for your children. It is important that small children only use a minimal amount of fluoridated toothpaste ("pea-size") in order to prevent fluorosis. Fluoride rinses such as "ACT," and brush-on gels such as "Prevident" are not suitable for young children, and are generally recommended for our teenage patients only.

Nursing Bottle Decay:

It is important never to put a child to bed with a bottle filled with milk, formula or juice. If a bottle is needed to help your child sleep, fill it only with water. Don't allow your child to "walk around" with a bottle between mealtimes.