



Diabetes
New Zealand

The right food for your teeth

Choosing the right foods will not only help keep your blood glucose levels within the desirable range, thereby reducing the chance of gum disease, but will also reduce your chance of developing cavities in your teeth.

To enable you to eat the foods recommended for good health such as plenty of fruit and vegetables, wholegrain breads and cereals, your teeth need to be in optimum condition.

Calcium is essential for strong teeth and bones. Milk and milk products or soy products are good sources of calcium.



What effect does sugar have?

Eating sugar is a cause of tooth decay. But it's not just how much sugar you eat. When and how you eat it can be just as important to keeping teeth healthy.

When you eat sugary foods or drink sweet drinks frequently throughout the day, the bacteria in your mouth mix with the sugars to make a mild acid. This acid attacks enamel, the hard outer layer of teeth. It can make holes called cavities in the teeth. This acid attacks teeth for at least 20 minutes after food is eaten.

Any kind of sugar will mix with bacteria in the mouth. Natural sugars can have the same effect on teeth as white sugar. Many foods contain natural sugars.

For example, milk contains a natural sugar called lactose and fruit juice contains fructose. Even fruit juice that says 'no sugar added' still contains natural sugar.

Hard sweets such as barley sugars, cough drops and mints that contain sugar are especially harmful because they dissolve slowly in your mouth exposing your teeth to acids for prolonged periods of time. Sticky foods such as dried fruits and fruit leathers also contain a lot of sugar and can stick to teeth for long periods of time.

How can you determine the sugar content?

Read the labels of the packaged food you buy. By law, every ingredient in packaged food is listed by weight. So if a sugar is listed as one of the first three ingredients, you'll know there is a lot of sugar in the food.

Other names for sugar include:

- Brown sugar • Caster sugar • Corn syrup
- Dextrose • Disaccharides • Fructose • Glucose
- Golden syrup • Honey • Invert sugar
- Lactose • Malt extract • Maltose

Check if liquid medicines such as cough syrup have sugars. Ask your doctor or pharmacist to give you medicines that are sugar free.



Water is the best drink. Tap water is preferable to bottled water as it generally contains fluoride which protects teeth.

7 steps to look after your teeth

- 1 Sugary foods or foods containing carbohydrates cause less harm to your teeth when eaten with a meal than when they're eaten alone. This is because the production of saliva, which washes away the sugar and bacteria, is increased.
- 2 Eating sugary foods before you go to bed can be the most damaging because you don't produce as much saliva when you sleep. So avoid sweet items such as sweet biscuits for supper.
- 3 Everyone should aim to brush their teeth twice a day, in the morning after breakfast and at night just before bed.
- 4 Chewing sugar free gum can help increase the production of saliva, which in turn can help to protect your teeth from decay.
- 5 In-between meal snacks are not always necessary. Check with your health care team if snacks are recommended as part of your diabetes management plan. Some suitable snacks include cheese, popcorn, raw veggies, yoghurt, fresh fruit, nuts and seeds. Your dietitian will provide you with further suggestions.
- 6 Cigarettes can stain your teeth, and contribute to gum disease. Coffee, tea or red wine may also stain your teeth. Avoid hard foods like ice or popcorn kernels as these can damage the enamel.
- 7 Remember to visit your dentist at least twice a year for a check up.