

The Oral Health Connection



Nutrition & Oral Health

Nutrition affects oral health and oral health affects nutrition. This interdependent relationship sees good nutritional health promoting good oral health (encompassing gum tissue status, the well-being of teeth and jaw, salivary quantity and quality, and sensory dimensions of taste and pain), and vice versa. On the other hand, poor nutritional health is associated with poor oral health, and vice versa.

Malnutrition, Infectious Diseases, and the Immune System

Nutrition is a major factor in infection and inflammation. Several reports emphasize the synergistic relationship between malnutrition, infectious diseases and the immune system; for example, infections promote malnutrition, the malnutrition elicits dysfunctions of the immune system, and this impaired immunity intensifies the infectious disease. In oral health, cavities and gum disease, as well as many diseases of the mucous membranes, tongue and salivary glands, are infectious. These oral infections can not only disrupt the integrity of the oral cavity, but can also affect general health.

How nutrition affects oral health

The foods that you eat come in contact with the germs and bacteria that live in the mouth. If you don't brush, plaque will accumulate on the teeth. Plaque thrives on the starches and sugars that are found in a great deal of foods. When plaque combines with the sugars and starches, an acid is produced that attacks enamel on the teeth, and eventually causes decay. According to the American Dental Association, the acid attacks the teeth for 20 minutes or more.

Choosing a healthy diet

Choosing a healthy diet may sound easy; however, fruits, milk, cereals, bread and some vegetables contain sugars and / or starches. Carbonated sodas, sweet fruit drinks and sugary snack foods should be limited. You don't have to avoid these foods, just keep in mind that you should eat a balanced diet, brush and floss your teeth twice a day.

Healthy Tips

- Drink plenty of water
- Eat food from all 5 food groups
- Limit snacking between meals (Each time you eat food that contains sugars or starches, the teeth are attacked by acids for 20 minutes)
- Limit snacks high in sugar and acid (choose nutritious foods, such as cheese, raw vegetables, plain yogurt, or a piece of fruit).
- Brush and floss your teeth twice a day
- Visit your dentist every 6 months

Remember, a well-balanced diet, consisting of a complex mixture of good quality carbohydrates, lipids, proteins, vitamins and minerals, is required for maintenance of optimal general and oral health.