



AUSTRALIAN DENTAL
ASSOCIATION INC.

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DECAY AND SUGAR

Just as frequent snacking is a contributing factor to the problem of obesity among children in Australia; it is also having a detrimental effect on oral health.

Snacks, particularly those with high sugar levels, feed the destructive bacteria in your mouth, which in turn puts acid on your teeth.

Sugary sweets such as lolly pops that release sugar slowly over long periods are the most dangerous for our teeth in this regard. The lolly on a stick is extremely dangerous because the child can remove it from the mouth, making the sweet last longer and prolonging the exposure to sugar.

Sugary fizzy drinks and fruit juices also have an adverse effect. Even low-calorie or 'diet' fizzy drinks can be damaging. Those drinks that combine sugar with caffeine, like many of the fashionable energy drinks, can be a dangerous cocktail if consumed excessively. They tend to reduce the flow of saliva (which is essential for the diluting of the acid in the mouth) and so damage to teeth can result.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO LIMIT THE PROBLEM?

There are a number of different methods to protect your children's teeth from tooth decay. The Australian Dental Association recommends the following:

1. Reduce the frequency of the consumption

Each time food containing sugar or starch is eaten, bacteria are immediately activated to pump out acids which attack teeth for at least 20 minutes.

The ADA suggests children eat foods like these only occasionally, if possible around meal times. Children also should not be eating these types of foods late in the evening, and absolutely should not be eating them after cleaning their teeth before bed.

2. Monitor the types of food your children snack on

The foods children snack on need to be consistently scrutinized and managed.

For example the ADA recommends children snack on foods that are much less likely to stick to a child's teeth. Carrots leave little or no residue in the mouth after they are eaten. Sugary sweets or biscuits stick to the teeth, feeding the bacteria which attack the teeth and cause decay.

Snacks like cheese, fruit and vegetables should be strongly encouraged and so children are consistently informed of the benefits to teeth and general health. Conversely, snacks like lollies, soft drinks and biscuits should be limited and discouraged.

3. Is there anything else parents can do to protect children's teeth from decay?

If children have been given a special sugary treat, the ADA recommends three different ways to ensure any decay is kept to a minimum.

1. Eat it at the completion of a meal.
2. Ensure that the child is consistently having frequent sips of water to wash away as much of the sugary food and acids as possible. It also ensures that the mouth is adequately moist, as a dry mouth is less protected from bacteria and acids.
3. If your child is old enough, provide the child with sugar free gum after consumption of the sugary sweets. This stimulates saliva flow and again protects the teeth from decay.

For more information about ADA Dental Health Week, for interview and/or feature and pictorial opportunities with an ADA spokesperson, please contact Porter Novelli Melbourne:

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