

How to avoid future tooth decay

Tooth decay is a multi-factorial disease involving diet, oral hygiene as well as individual patient susceptibility.

An important part of the overall management of your child will be to help reduce his/her ongoing risk of developing cavities in the future. This will involve:

1. Improving oral hygiene. Brushing and flossing will be demonstrated to you and your child at a future appointment. Children should have parental assistance with brushing until approximately 8 years of age. Supervision of brushing and flossing is required for older children.
2. Ensuring adequate fluoride protection, brushing for 2 minutes 2 times a day with an appropriate toothpaste. Children should spit out the toothpaste after brushing but not rinse to allow fluoride from the toothpaste to have a maximum protective effect on their teeth.
3. Both what your child eats and their eating patterns can affect their risk of developing tooth decay. If your child snacks a lot or grazes on food they have an increased risk of developing tooth decay – even if they are eating very healthy snacks. Try to limit the number of times your child eats or drinks anything other than water to only 5 or 6 times per day. Diet assessment and further discussion about diet may be required in some patients once a diet record has been completed.
4. Institute “treat day” - once per week your child can have a special sweet treat. Try to make it the same day every week and this way your child will get used to not having treats every day.
5. Ensure your child drinks plenty of water as dehydration can lessen saliva’s ability to neutralise acids in the mouth after eating and increase the risk of tooth decay.
6. You may have been advised that application of tooth mousse (a mineral cream) is appropriate for your child. Tooth mousse will help reverse the effects of acid attack on tooth enamel, slowing the decay process. It can also help in cases where the teeth have formed with less than the normal mineral content in the enamel “chalky teeth”.
7. Your child will benefit from 3 or 6 monthly application of topical fluoride varnish at the dentist to help avoid development of future cavities.
8. Fissure sealants are recommended to be placed in the grooves of the permanent molar teeth when these teeth erupt to prevent them from developing cavities in this spot where most cavities in adult teeth occur. This preventive measure is particularly important for children with a history of decay in their baby teeth.
9. Regular dental check-ups are also important in helping to maintain good oral health as picking up problems early is important. Regular attendance also helps your child to become more relaxed about dental visits and dental treatment as well as helping to reinforce to your child the importance of caring for their teeth.



Dr Angel Babu
Specialist Paediatric Dentist
DClinDent (PAED) (Otago)