

How to Prevent Cavities

As I mentioned in my last article, dental decay runs rampant in Howard County. Cavities (dental caries) are actually caused by acid produced by bacteria as they metabolize sugars. Here are some condensed strategies on how to reduce cavities in your family.

Diet Content. Sugar promotes decay. The American diet, being very high in sugar, is promoting many health problems like obesity and diabetes. It also promotes cavities, big time. Table sugar, sucrose, is the most cavity producing. Other sugars (like fructose, corn syrup, lactose) that are in many processed foods cause cavities as well. Parents give your kids lots of water (instead of flavored drinks or fruit juices) to drink and give them fruit, nuts, or other healthy snacks. However, almost anything, even healthy things, in the mouth all the time will cause problems.

Diet Frequency. Yes the frequency can make even healthy food and drink cause decay. Even milk can cause cavities if a young child is sipping on it all day or if very young child is put to bed with a bottle. This can be an adult problem as well. Many patients I examine will have a mouth full of cavities from sipping on sweetened beverages or nibbling on candies all day at work.

Home Care. Most people know that plaque is the sticky, gooey film that adheres to all surfaces of the teeth. It is composed of bacterial that cause cavities and gum disease and their products. If the plaque can be removed at least once a day by effective brushing and flossing, cavities become far less common. The bad news is that most people are relatively ineffective in their brushing and flossing is only occasional if at all.

Fluoride. Fluoride in proper amounts is a safe and effective way to reduce cavities. Most people in Howard Co. drink RO which has no fluoride in it. I recommend parents of kids up to twelve to consider buying bottled water “with fluoride” to help. Toothpastes with fluoride are helpful, assuming the child is old enough to spit after brushing. People with severe cavity problems are often prescribed toothpastes that have more fluoride.

Professional Care. It is critical that people see their dentist regularly, meaning twice a year for most people. Your teeth will be thoroughly cleaned of plaque and tartar. Your dentist or hygienist will coach you how you may be able to do a better job at home. Also, any cavities can be detected and fixed, hopefully before they become large and costly.

Saliva. Saliva is the best friend of your teeth. It helps buffer the acid attacks that cause cavities and helps remineralize microscopic areas of decay. When salivary production is reduced, like when sleeping, decay happens much faster. So nothing other than water should go in the mouth after night time brushing until breakfast. Also, medicines that continually cause a dry mouth really put people at severe risk for decay.

Finally, remember that some people are not blessed with strong enamel on their teeth. If you are in this group, you are going to have to work harder than the average person. Talk to your dentists about strategies to help!