

How to Stop Tooth Decay (Dental Caries)

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Tooth decay is the same as **dental decay**. It is also known as **dental caries**. It results in a **cavity in the tooth** and if untreated can spread from the tooth enamel (the hard outer covering of the tooth) into the softer dentine inside. Tooth decay is one of the most common health complaints in the world. It is particularly common in children and young adults, and rates have been fuelled by an increase in sugars in the diet, and poor dental hygiene.

Although tooth decay has declined among young children as a group, it can still be a problem for individual children, and even teens and adults. That's because plaque, a sticky film of bacteria, constantly forms on your teeth. When you eat or drink foods containing sugars or starches, the bacteria in plaque produce acids that attack tooth enamel. The stickiness of the plaque keeps these acids in contact with your teeth and after many such attacks, the enamel can break down and a cavity forms.

Causes of tooth decay

The problem is caused by sticky deposits called plaque that collect, in particular, around the gum line, the edges of fillings and the grooved surfaces of the teeth.

Plaque is made up of food debris, saliva and the bacteria that are normally present in the mouth, and convert food into acids. If plaque is allowed to collect over time it will harden into a substance called tartar. Both tartar and plaque contain acids which, over time, can dissolve away the protective, hard enamel coating of the tooth, and create holes, or cavities.

Most cavities form over a period of months, or even years. They are usually painless, but they can grow very large, and damage the much softer internal structures of the tooth such as the dentin and the pulp, which is found at the core.

If they remain untreated, they can kill the nerve and blood vessels of the tooth, and ultimately the tooth itself. Tooth decay should be prevented.



Symptoms of tooth decay

In the early stages of dental decay there may be no symptoms but your [dentist](#) may be able to detect an early cavity through examination and x-ray. It is for this reason that you should visit your dentist regularly as small cavities are much easier to treat than advanced decay.

Once the cavity has reached the dentine you may notice sensitivity, particularly with sweet foods and [drinks](#), acidic or hot foods.

As the decay nears the dental pulp you may suffer from [toothache](#). If the toothache is brought on by hot or sweet foods this may last for only a few minutes. As the decay gets closer to the dental pulp the pain may be persistent and you may need to take painkillers, paracetamol or ibuprofen, to control the pain. It is essential to visit your dentist immediately or the tooth will

die and you may develop a dental abscess.

Toothache is a symptom indicating that something is wrong, probably with one or more teeth. Neglect will usually make matters worse, and a tooth may possibly be lost that could otherwise have been saved. Toothache is a sign that you should visit a dentist immediately.

Tooth decay prevention

The best way to keep your teeth in health condition, and particularly prevent tooth decay, is to ensure that you clean them regularly to get rid of any plaque build up.

Most dentists recommend that you clean your teeth at least twice a day. Using a toothpaste containing fluoride is probably a good idea as this provides the teeth with added protection from the effects of acid.

Flossing between the teeth is also a good idea for preventing dental caries, as is rinsing out your mouth after eating sticky foods.

It is also important to have a regular check up at the dentist – most suggest once every six months to a year.

Tooth decay and dental caries treatment

Tooth decay is treated by drilling out all the decayed matter and filling the cavity. This will be carried out under a local anaesthetic. Several different types of filling can be used depending on the extent of the decay and your dentist will advise you on the available possibilities.

In advanced cases of dental decay where the dental pulp is affected or a dental abscess has been formed, it may be necessary to carry out a root filling on the tooth or even to remove the remaining tooth.

Prevention is more effective than cure and careful oral hygiene and home care can prevent cavities forming. Regular visits to your dentist will ensure that any problems are caught early and are easy to treat.

Baby bottle tooth decay

This is a dental condition that occurs in children between 18 months and 3 years of age as a result of being given a bottle at bedtime, resulting in prolonged exposure of the teeth to milk or juice.

Caries (tooth decay) are formed because pools of milk or juice in the mouth break down to lactic acid and other decay-causing substances.

Do not put your infant or small child to bed with a bottle of milk, formula, juice, or other product that contains sugar. Sugar and acids in these liquids can cause tooth decay.

Interesting fact about tooth decay (dental caries)

More specifically, tooth decay (dental caries) was not a major problem before the fateful year of 1886. Why 1886? That was the year that Coca Cola was first invented and marketed. What's Coca Cola got to do with it?

Prior to the mass marketing of Coca Cola, Americans (and the rest of the world) tended to eat sweet foods only at meal times, which in an agrarian society happened at only two or three discreet times a day. Meals were high in fat, but fairly low in sugar, and the closest most people got to sugar during the course of a week was a slice or two of mom's apple pie. In general, tooth decay wasn't all that much of a problem with most Americans unless they were among the upper classes. Rich folks were somewhat more likely to indulge in recreational eating and could afford to hire cooks and servants whose livelihood was dependent on pleasing their employers.

Almost everyone who is prone to caries has a specific habit in which sugar soaks the teeth many, many times a day. These sugar habits account for perhaps 95% of all caries! If you can identify the habit, and substitute a diet drink, or a non sugared food in its place, the decay simply stops where it is.