

Question

When to brush your teeth

Is there a time that's best to brush your teeth? After certain foods?

Answer

from Alan Carr, D.M.D.

At a minimum, the American Dental Association recommends that you brush your teeth twice a day; one time should be before sleep. But if you snack and drink throughout the day, it may be helpful to brush your teeth more often.

When you brush your teeth, you help remove plaque — a sticky film that forms on your teeth because of bacteria in your mouth. The bacteria in plaque causes the two major tooth-related diseases, cavities (dental caries) and gum disease (periodontitis).

It's important to brush your teeth after you eat, because certain food and drinks cause bacteria in your mouth to release acids that are harmful to your tooth enamel. When you eat food or drink beverages containing sugar or starch, the bacteria in your mouth produce acids that can attack your tooth enamel for 20 minutes or more. Choosing nutritious foods that are low in carbohydrates and sugar and drinking plenty of water also can help reduce harmful acid production.

One caveat to brushing after you eat is if you've eaten an acidic food or drink — for example, orange juice. Avoid brushing your teeth for at least 30 minutes after acidic foods and beverages. These acids weaken tooth enamel, and brushing too soon can cause damage to the enamel. If you know you're going to eat or drink something very acidic ahead of time, you may want to brush your teeth first.

Brushing your teeth alone can't remove all of the decay-causing plaque. The American Dental Association also recommends using an antimicrobial mouth rinse plus flossing daily between your teeth to get rid of food particles and minimize plaque and bacteria.
