

Game Plan for Healthy Teeth



By taking care of your teeth today, you can stop cavities from happening tomorrow. Brush twice a day, floss daily and keep your teeth strong by drinking fluoridated water and choosing healthy foods.

THE OPPOSITION

The secret to a healthy smile? Understanding what you're up against. Learn about your teeth's enemies and how to fight back.



Plaque

Your biggest rival is plaque — a sticky, colorless film that collects on your teeth every day. When you eat, bacteria in plaque transform food sugars to acids, which then attack tooth enamel for 20 minutes afterwards. Over time, plaque forms tartar, a hard deposit that only your dentist can remove.

Since plaque is invisible, fight back with your secret weapon: disclosing solution. Buy one at a drugstore or make your own by mixing two drops of blue or green food coloring with two teaspoons of water. The solution “discloses” the location of plaque on your teeth, revealing any spots you’ve missed while brushing.



Decay

When plaque isn't conquered regularly, tooth enamel breaks down, causing decay. Decay spreads from the outside towards the center of your tooth. Detected early, it can be treated by a filling. If left untreated, decay may eventually reach the nerve, causing a serious toothache that may require a root canal or tooth extraction.



Diet

What you eat and drinks affects your teeth. Sugar in any form, including honey and even natural sugars found in fruit and dairy products, can damage your teeth. The most harmful sugars are those that stick to the teeth, like caramel, and those that remain in the mouth for a long time, like hard candies. Starchy foods, such as potato chips and crackers, also contain sugars that affect teeth. Save them for meals — and brush after.

YOUR PREVENTIVE CARE TEAM



Toothbrush

Angled necks, narrowed heads, staggered bristles, electric:

Which toothbrush is best? It

depends on you. Choose a design that is comfortable for you. Look for:

- **A small head**, making it easier to access all areas of your mouth.
- **Soft, round-ended bristles**, which clean teeth and stimulate gums without damaging them.

Electric toothbrushes aren't more effective than regular brushing, but they can help people who have difficulty brushing by hand. They also tend to have built-in timers: a useful feature if you have trouble brushing for the full two minutes.



Toothpaste

The ingredients in your toothpaste form a powerful defense:

- **Fluoride:** Fluoride helps teeth retain calcium, keeping them strong to stop decay. This is your No. 1 cavity fighter, so make sure your toothpaste includes it!
- **Abrasives:** Abrasive ingredients help remove bacteria and stains but can harm enamel if overused.
- **Tartar control:** This type of toothpaste is slightly more abrasive so it can break down hardened plaque, known as tartar. Excessive use may wear down enamel or cause canker sores.

Remember: Your toothbrush gets a daily workout! To keep it in tip-top shape, replace it every two to three months and after a cold.

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