

Health & Wellness

Summer Parties Can Bring Summer Cavities and More

Top Five Ways to Keep a Healthy Summer Smile

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Lata Stefano, D.D.S. and owner of Lata Stefano, D.D.S., Inc. general dentistry practice in Sandusky, Ohio, highlights some simple techniques to make some healthy eating choices this summer and how to avoid summer cavities when summer parties and picnics are abundant.

1. Low pH value - Frequently consuming foods with a low pH value, such as soft drinks, fruit juices, pickles, fresh fruit and yogurt can lead to irreversible dental erosion according to the Academy of General Dentistry. Dental erosion is the breakdown of tooth structure caused by the effect of acid on the teeth. Dental enamel is the thin, outer layer of hard tissue that helps maintain the tooth's structure and shape while protecting it from decay.

Acids found in common foods:

*Soft drinks - phosphoric acid - even DIET soda has this.

*Fruit and fruit products - citric and malic acids

*Fermented products (yogurt) - lactic acid

*Grapes and wines - tartaric acid

After eating or drinking:

*Chew sugar-free gum to stimulate saliva flow.

*Rinse with water for 30 seconds.

*Use fluoride toothpaste.

2. Immune System - People with lowered immune systems have been shown to be at higher risk for periodontal disease. Additionally, research shows a link between oral health and systemic conditions, such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Dry mouth or xerostomia can be a side effect of many medications and due to the lack of saliva flow, cavities can form easier. So watch the acidic foods here also. Eating a variety of foods as part of a well-balanced diet may not only improve your dental health, but increasing fiber and vitamin intake may also reduce the risk of other diseases.

3. Snacks - Always keep your mouth moist by drinking lots of water. Saliva protects both hard and soft oral tissues. If you have a dry mouth, supplement your diet with sugarless candy or gum to stimulate saliva. Foods that cling to your teeth promote tooth decay. So when you snack, avoid soft, sweet, sticky foods such as cakes, candy and dried fruits, including raisins. Instead, choose dentally healthy foods such as nuts, raw vegetables, plain yogurt, cheese and sugarless gum or candy.

When you eat fermentable carbohydrates, such as

crackers, cookies and chips, eat them as part of your meal, instead of by themselves. Combinations of foods neutralize acids in the mouth and inhibit tooth decay. For example, enjoy cheese with your crackers. Your snack will be just as satisfying and better for your dental health.

4. Consult your Dentist - If the health of your teeth is ever in question, don't hesitate to contact your dentist for a consultation and schedule a hygiene visit and oral cancer screening every six months. Remember, even if you have full dentures, your gums and soft tissue in your mouth should be examined annually for oral cancer. If detected early, this is very treatable. The advice from an expert is essential. Make sure you use sunscreen on your lips also. Sun exposure and foods high in acid like tomatoes and citrus fruits can trigger cold sores to emerge if you are prone to them. Lip balm with SPF will protect your lips from burning as well. Your lips can develop skin cancer just as any other area of your body.

5. Sugar/High Fructose Corn Syrup - Living in a culture that moves as quickly as ours, it's easy to bypass a nutritious diet in favor of a diet comprised of fast food and snacks high in sugar. The detrimental effects of this lifestyle are clear. According to the Academy of General Dentistry, more than 25 percent of children between the ages of 2 and 5 have experienced tooth decay, and almost 80 percent of young people have had a cavity by age 17. Check your labels; it seems many foods and beverages have high fructose corn syrup as an ingredient.

For example, the average 12-ounce can of soda contains 10 teaspoons of sugar; and many manufacturers incorporate sugar into their foods to help ensure a return purchase. Today, the average person consumes approximately 150 pounds of sugar a year, or about 40 teaspoons a day. It's not only our culture that defines the amount of sugar we consume, but also a lack of education on how much sugar we consume every day - especially when it comes to children and the elderly.

For questions about this article or for more information about Lata Stefano, DDS, Inc., visit their web site at www.stefanodental.com or call 419.626.2205.

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