Diet and Tooth Decay

JOTHI DENTAL CENTRE

1. What is the main dietary cause of tooth decay?

- The main dietary cause of tooth decay is eating too much sugar.
- Tooth decay can be reduced by controlling plaque formation and the intake of sugar. These are the two main causes of decay.

2. What is dental plaque?

- Dental plaque is a thin coating of bacteria and food particles that sticks to the teeth, and converts dietary sugars to acid.
    - It cannot be rinsed off.
    - It can only be removed by brushing and flossing, and by professional cleaning by a dentist or dental hygienist.
    - The longer plaque is allowed to stick to the teeth, the greater are the chances that it will cause tooth decay and gum disease.
- Dental plaque can be seen by using disclosing tablets. This is how it works:
    - After chewing a tablet the plaque left on teeth is stained a bright pink colour.
    - Further brushing of the stained areas is needed until the pink stain is removed. This will confirm that all the plaque has been brushed away.
    - Disclosing tablets or solutions should be an integral part of tooth cleaning.
    - They allow us to see how well, or badly we are brushing our teeth.
    - They must not be swallowed.

Plaque stained by disclosing tablet

After more brushing

3. Why are sugars so harmful to dental health?

- Added sugars in refined foods such as cakes, biscuits, sweets, and soft drinks, assist plaque to accumulate and develop on teeth.
- Plaque causes tooth decay and gum disease.

4. Are all sugars harmful to dental health?

- Sugars which occur naturally in milk and fruit are not regarded as a significant problem.
- The added sugars in foods are a major threat to the health of teeth and gums. They are also a risk to General's health.

5. Which foods are bad for the teeth?

- The carbohydrates that cause tooth decay and assist plaque in the process, are found In sweet tasting foods such as:

    - Table sugar.
    - Added sugars in food.
    - Sweet, carbohydrate-rich snacks and soft drinks.
    - Fizzy soft drinks, including diet drinks.

- Decay is caused by the sugar and acid content of soft drinks.

6. Will reducing my sugar consumption prevent tooth decay?

- Reducing your sugar intake will decrease the rate of plaque formation, and the decay that it causes.

    - Reducing the amount of sugar consumed is important, but it is not enough.
    - Frequency of sugar intake does the most damage.
    - Avoid frequent snacking.
    - Restrict sugar intake to meal times.
    - Prolonged exposure of the teeth to sugars, even natural sugars, stimulates plaque formation and tooth decay.

- However, there are some causes of decay that are not related to diet. Reducing your sugar intake is not the only requirement for eliminating tooth decay. It must be combined with the thorough and regular practice of oral hygiene.

7. How can I be sure that I am eating a healthy diet?

- Ideally, healthy eating patterns should be established in childhood, when our parents are in control of our sugar intake.
- Unfortunately, many of us are not sensible eaters.
- Here are some guidelines:

    - Replace table sugar with artificial sweeteners when drinking tea or coffee.
    - If possible, eat fewer sweets, cakes or biscuits. This can be difficult as we are often attracted to sweet flavours.
    - Whenever possible, eat a piece of fruit instead of sweets or chocolates.
    - Have a fruit juice instead of a drink containing added sugar.
    - Foods and drinks containing artificial sweeteners such as xylitol and aspartame are available, and these do not cause decay. As far as is known, they have no adverse side effects.
    - It is important to read the contents of prepared foods that you buy.
    - A taste for unhealthy foods is often encouraged by attractive packaging, and by advertisers.
    - Foods containing high levels of sugar are best left on the supermarket shelves!

8. Are there any foods that inhibit dental disease?

- Foods that require vigorous chewing such as raw fruit and vegetables, stimulate the flow of saliva and reduce the risk of dental disease.

    - Saliva dilutes the acids formed by the interaction of bacteria and sugar.
    - These acids cause tooth decay, so diluting them helps to prevent decay.
    - Sugarless chewing gum stimulates saliva flow, and also helps to remove plaque by its physical contact with the tooth surface.
    - Chewing gum containing sugar is no help at all, but simply adds to the problem of excessive sugar in the diet.
    - Eating cheese after a meal can reduce the effect of the acid in the mouth.