

There are many factors that influence the development of dental caries (decay/cavities). It can be related to the natural shape of the teeth, the number and composition of bacteria in the mouth, saliva quality and quantity, diet, oral hygiene and fluoride exposure. The latter of these are in our control (Diet, oral hygiene and fluoride). Please remember that dental disease such as **dental caries is preventable**. Here are some useful tips on maintaining healthy teeth:

## Food and Drink Choices

It is important to consider your food and drink options as well as your frequency of eating and snacking. **The bacteria in our mouths convert all carbohydrates such as glucose, sucrose, fructose and starch into acidic plaque.** This leads to demineralization of the tooth surface and can progress quickly into a cavity requiring a filling. For this reason it is important to try to limit the amount of sugars you consume. The time it takes to clear the mouth of food is an important factor to consider as well. The sticky foods such as processed savoury snacks, bread, lollies and dried fruit stay in the mouth a lot longer, stuck in the grooves of the teeth, increasing the risk of dental caries.

*Most dairy products such as cheese, plain milk and plain yoghurt are protective and an excellent way to finish a meal.*

## Frequency of Eating

**The frequency of sugar and carbohydrate** consumption is a *major* contributing factor to dental caries. Frequent small snacks can increase risk as opposed to large meals eaten all at once. This is due to the acid that is produced by the plaque bacteria in our mouths every time we eat. If the normal pH level of the mouth drops below 5.7, dental caries can occur. **It takes about 30 minutes for the pH to return to normal every time we eat.** Our saliva has buffering capacity to return pH to normal. So you can imagine if you were to snack on a small packet of biscuits over a 2 hour period, they are subjected to a 2 hr 30min acid attack in their mouth. If you were to eat all of the biscuits in one sitting (approx 15 min) the acidity level would be expected to return to normal within 45 minutes. Much better!

## Oral Hygiene Routine

**Plaque removal** – The transparent, sticky combination of bacteria forms within approximately 20min of being removed and ideally should be removed twice daily. It is best to wait 30 minutes after food and drink before removing plaque.

**Tooth brushing** – It is important to concentrate along the gum line when brushing as this is the most common area for plaque to linger.

**Floss** –Daily dental floss cleans in between the teeth where the toothbrush cannot reach. Specialty brushes like “Piksters” are also very effective to clean spaces between teeth.

**Fluoride** – Daily exposure to topical fluoride through our water supply provides teeth with the necessary preventive protection. Fluoride toothpaste is an added benefit in prevention of dental caries. We recommend using only a small drop of toothpaste on the toothbrush (approximately the size of a pea) and after brushing – spit any excess toothpaste out but avoid rinsing with water or mouth rinse. **Recaldent** products such as ToothMousse (Plus) and Recaldent Gum also aid in the protection and remineralisation of enamel.