

GOOD HEALTH AND NUTRITION

DENTAL HEALTH



A healthy balanced diet combined with good oral hygiene and regular preventive dental care can help keep teeth healthy.

What is tooth decay?

Every time we eat or drink, our teeth are exposed to an acid attack. The bacteria in the mouth (plaque) ferments food or drink to make acids, and if teeth are exposed to these acids long enough, cavities develop – this is known as tooth decay (dental caries). Consumption of sugary foods and drinks on a regular basis is the number one cause of tooth decay.

TIP



Avoid unnecessary sugars in your diet and limit the frequency of snacking and sipping to decrease the risk of developing tooth decay.

Why is saliva important?

Saliva is the body's natural defence against tooth decay. It helps to dilute and wash acids and sugars from the mouth and reduces the effects of the acids produced by plaque bacteria. If 'acid attacks' occur too often, your saliva won't have enough time to repair the damage and a cavity will eventually develop in the tooth.

What is tooth erosion?

Enamel is the hardest material in the body, it covers the outside of teeth in order to protect the inner layers of the teeth. Tooth erosion occurs when acidic foods and drinks dissolve away tooth enamel, leading to a loss of tooth structure and the need for dental treatment. Foods and drinks that are acidic (with a pH below about 5.5) are generally thought to trigger tooth erosion.

Which drinks can be erosive?

| Drink | pH | |
|------------------|---------|-----------------------|
| Saliva | 7.0 | → Non-erosive |
| Milk | 6.9 | |
| Water | 6.0–7.0 | |
| pH 5.5 | | |
| Beer | 4.0–5.0 | → Potentially erosive |
| Herbal teas | 3.1–3.8 | |
| Sports drinks | 3.0 | |
| Orange juice | 2.8–4.0 | |
| Soft/diet drinks | 2.7 | |
| Alcopops | 2.5–2.8 | |
| Wine | 2.3–3.8 | |

Dairy foods and dental health

Studies show that eating hard cheese may protect against tooth decay, and that plain milk and sugar-free yoghurt have either a neutral or beneficial effect on teeth.

Flavoured milk and yoghurt are thought to have a negligible or low impact on tooth decay if their added sugar content is 5% or less. As food labels in Australia list 'total sugars' not 'added sugars' (and because milk and yoghurt naturally contain lactose, a type of sugar that is not linked to tooth decay), look for flavoured milks and yoghurts that contain 10g per 100ml or less of 'total sugars'. In addition, studies show that milk, hard cheese and yoghurt are not linked to dental erosion.

Dairy's beneficial impact on dental health is likely to be due to the fact that milk, cheese and yoghurt contain calcium, phosphorus and the protein casein – nutrients which have been shown to protect tooth enamel.

In addition, milk, cheese and yoghurt are all found within one of the five, healthy food groups. They can play an important role in achieving good nutrition throughout both childhood and adulthood. Milk, cheese and yoghurt are an excellent source of calcium; very few other foods in the Australian diet contain as much of this important nutrient. They are also a good source of other key nutrients including protein, iodine, riboflavin and vitamin B12.

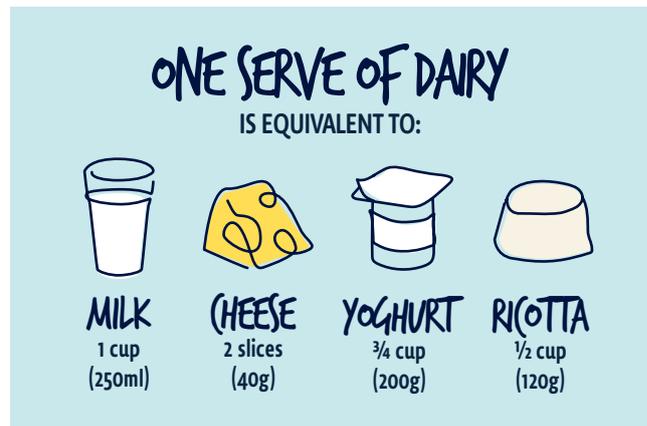
ACCORDING TO THE AUSTRALIAN DIETARY GUIDELINES, MILK AND WATER ARE THE RECOMMENDED DRINKS FOR CHILDREN.

Research has shown that milk, cheese and yoghurt can also help reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke, reduce our risk of high blood pressure and some cancers and may reduce our risk of type 2 diabetes. Most Australians don't consume enough of the foods from the dairy food group, and so are missing out on the numerous health benefits linked with these foods.

Minimum recommended number of serves from the dairy food group

| | Age (years) | No. of serves per day |
|-------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Men | 19–70 | 2 ½ |
| | 70+ | 3 ½ |
| Women | 19–50 | 2 ½ |
| | 50+ | 4 |
| | Pregnant or breast feeding | 2 ½ |
| Boys | 2–3 | 1 ½ |
| | 4–8 | 2 |
| | 9–11 | 2 ½ |
| | 12–18 | 3 ½ |
| Girls | 2–3 | 1 ½ |
| | 4–8 | 1 ½ |
| | 9–11 | 3 |
| | 12–18 | 3 ½ |

*Adapted from: 2013 Australian Dietary Guidelines. The dairy food group includes milk, cheese, yoghurt and/or alternatives.**



*Alternatives include: 250ml soy, rice or other cereal drink with at least 100mg of added calcium per 100ml.

Looking after your teeth is a lifelong commitment. Here are some tooth-friendly tips about what to eat and drink:

- 1 Drink tap water rather than bottled water, as it usually contains fluoride at a level that helps to protect against tooth decay.
- 2 Offer children milk or water – the only recommended drinks for children.
- 3 Eat a small amount of hard cheese after meals to help protect teeth from dental decay.
- 4 Limit intake of sugary drinks and foods. Sugary drinks include soft drinks, 'sports drinks', 'vitamin waters', cordials, fruit juice, fruit drinks and energy drinks.
- 5 Limit intake of acidic drinks, such as fruit juice, 'sports drinks', soft drinks, wine, alcopops and 'diet' or artificially sweetened soft drinks.

OTHER TIPS FOR GOOD DENTAL HEALTH:



- See a dentist for a check-up at least once a year.
- Always use a fluoridated toothpaste.
- Do not add sugar or sweeteners to babies' bottles or food and don't put it on babies' pacifiers (dummies).
- Never put a baby to bed sucking a bottle (unless it is filled with only water).