



Cornerstone Dental Group

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Cavities and How You Get Them

This is an issue we deal with daily and one of the main reasons we are here. Many of the problems with teeth result either directly or indirectly from decay. So how does it all work, and what does it take to get or prevent a cavity?!?

Three things must be present for tooth decay or cavities to happen: you need bacteria, food for the bacteria and teeth. Dealing with any one factor will affect the formation of cavities.

Let's start with teeth. For a cavity to form, you need teeth; people without teeth don't get cavities. This is what we are working to prevent, and only in severe cases do we recommend extracting teeth.

Bacteria are the critters that cause tooth decay. We've all heard the story that bacteria take the sugars in our diet and produce acid, which causes cavities - it's true! So, anything we can do to reduce the number of bacteria in our mouth will help prevent decay. This is pretty straightforward: brush with fluoride-containing toothpaste and floss your teeth. This accomplishes two things. First, you are physically removing bacteria; second, fluoride kills bacteria. But there is more; fluoride also strengthens your teeth, making them more decay-resistant. Depending on people's decay rate, we sometimes recommend toothpaste like Prevident 5000, which contains higher fluoride concentrations, or mouth rinses that contain fluoride. An electric toothbrush is also a huge adjunct, as they are faster and more efficient in removing bacteria from your teeth. A note aside, the health of your gums will benefit too!

The last factor in the decay process that is often overlooked is *food for the bugs*. Simply put, bacteria need sugar to produce acid. If you never ate, then there would be no bacteria. That is unrealistic, but we can control what we eat and how we eat it. Reducing the foods in our diet that our saliva can readily break down to simple sugars will reduce the number of bacteria in our mouths. As well, and often the missing link, reducing the frequency that you feed the bacteria will reduce your decay rate. The more you feed the bacteria, the more often your teeth are exposed to acid. This is why frequent snacking or sipping on beverages that contain sugar is bad for your teeth. We recommend no more than six exposures per day: breakfast, snack, lunch, snack, dinner and maybe another snack. So, we can reduce our decay rate by paying attention to what and how we eat and drink our favourite foods and beverages.

By altering any of the factors necessary for tooth decay, we can significantly reduce one's decay rate. In practice, we seldom deal with one factor but all of them. Don't hesitate to ask one of our knowledgeable staff for more information or questions!

Thank you, and if there are any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to call the office.