

What is tooth Decay?



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Tooth Decay Describes the condition wherein the tooth, under a variety of harsh conditions, breaks down leading to the formation of a cavity. It starts with a hole/opening in the enamel. If this is not treated, it progressively reaches the deeper sections of the tooth, where the pulp and the nerves are causing the tooth to become sensitive to a variety of stimuli, a variety of gum problems such as inflammation and swelling, pain, and ultimately tooth loss.

IS IT VERY COMMON?

Tooth decay is a common dental ailment that may occur at any time or age. However, since the onset of tooth decay is strongly related to the unregulated consumption of sweet foods and beverages; it tends to affect the young and adolescents more than any other age. One form is diagnosed in nursing infants and is referred to as nursing caries.

WHAT IS 'BABY BOTTLE TOOTH DECAY'?

A serious form of tooth decay affects nursing infants and is called 'Nursing caries or 'Baby bottle tooth decay'. In infants who are nursed continuously with a bottle/formula milk/pacifiers; the milk is retained in the mouth as the child falls asleep with the bottle. This milk is an excellent nutritive media for a variety of germs present in the mouth. The milk is broken down by the germs to form harsh acids which lead to the formation of a cavity on the tooth.

WHAT ARE THE CAUSES OF TOOTH DECAY?

POOR ORAL HYGIENE : Irregular & improper brushing, not flossing between teeth, not rinsing with water or mouthwash after meals speed up the process of tooth decay.

UNREGULATED DIET OF SWEET FOOD AND DRINKS: Periodic snacking on aerated drinks, jam, marmalade, even potato chips can lead to the formation of acidic by products which damage the surface of the tooth enamel. This is the reason why most young children and adolescents suffer from tooth decay.

BAD OR WORN OUT DENTAL FILLINGS : Tooth decay might develop again from exposed tooth surfaces.

WHAT CAN I DO IF I HAVE TOOTH DECAY?: If you have developed blackened spots on the inner or outer surfaces of teeth, or a sensitive tooth, it is likely that you're in the first stages of tooth decay. Visit your dentist immediately to undertake a comprehensive evaluation. If the onset of tooth decay is detected, a dentist will follow certain procedures:

1. Make an opening in the crown and remove the diseased pulp, clean the tooth chambers and root canals and seal them with silver amalgam or a tooth colored material to prevent bacteria from contaminating the canal.
2. The use of a fluoride-toothpaste that effectively prevents cavities is then suggested.

About the author

The author of this topic is Senior Dental Surgeon of Bijnor District Privately practicing since 1969.

Certain preventive measures are known to reduce the risk of tooth decay. You must practice these good dental habits:

BRUSHING

Brush your teeth twice a day. Hold a soft brush at the gum line at a 45° angle. Brush in a circular motion to massage the gums and an up-down motion to dislodge plaque. Do this gently on the outer as well as inner surfaces of teeth.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT TOOTHBRUSH

Dentists recommend using a toothbrush with soft bristles and a small head. Replace your toothbrush every 3 months or as soon as it loses its original shape. Once a brush loses its shape, you require more pressure for the same cleaning action. This extra pressure is damaging to gums as well as the protective enamel layer.

FLOSS

Floss daily to remove plaque from between teeth. Take about 18" of floss and wrap most of it around your middle finger and the rest around the middle finger of the other hand, leaving a 2" length between them. Using your thumb and forefinger, gently scrape the side of each tooth away from the gum.

RINSE

Rinse your mouth with water thoroughly after each meal. Rinse for a minute everyday with mouthwash.

DIET

Reducing the frequency of intake of sweets during the day, decreases the number of 'acid attack' by the digestive breakdown of these foods in mouth. This prevents further damage to the tooth.

Expectant mothers must be particularly careful with their diet and must make sure that it contains all the necessary nutrients and vitamins [described below] since the foundation of a child's teething is laid early in the second trimester [3 to 6 months]

A balanced diet that includes all food groups such as fresh fruits, vegetables, bread, cereals as well as other grain product, Dairy products such as milk, cheese, yogurt: meat, poultry, fish provides the essential nutrients required for dental growth. Smile if you dare, but bad teeth are no laughing matter.