

Sweet Teeth

February 2005 Nutrition Tip

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Did you know February is children’s dental health month? It is also a month when our “sweet tooth” can take a nasty hit—especially children’s. Most children love sweets, and can we blame them? We are born liking the sensation of sweetness. Sweetness is a sensory cue that foods contain energy that provides fuel for our bodies. Some foods contain sugar naturally, such as fruits and milk. These foods also contain important nutrients our bodies need.

Even so, too many sweets can take a toll on children’s dental health in more ways than we might think. Because children are growing so quickly, their bodies need lots of nutrients. Their teeth and gums need a variety of vitamins and minerals to develop. Most foods and beverages that are high in sugar are low in nutrients. When children consume too many of these high sugar foods and beverages they are not hungry for healthier, nutrient-dense foods.

We all know that sugar has been proven to contribute to dental cavities. In fact, 18 percent of children between age 1 and 6 develop early childhood cavities. Dental cavities are the number one cause of tooth loss in the United States. Diet plays an important role in the development of dental cavities, and tooth-healthy eating habits need to be established when we are young. Here are some tips for a “tooth-friendly” diet for your children:

- Limit snacks in between meals
- Have your children brush after snacking, or rinse out their mouths with water after snacking to clean out all the food particles
- Give children healthy fruits and vegetables to snack on – they can clean teeth with chewing
- Feed your children healthy dairy foods like yogurt, milk, and cheese – these can protect against cavities
- Avoid sticky sugars that can stay on the teeth
- Be sure to buy 100% juice products and limit juice to 4 to 6 ounces each day
- Never put your baby to bed with formula or juice in a bottle
- Avoid giving children high-sugar beverages like fruit punch and soft drinks

Source: American Dietetic Association www.eatright.org