



Dr Grant McAree

Ask Dr. Grant



DR GRANT IS ONE OF THE LEADING COSMETIC DENTISTS IN THE SOUTH WEST AND HAS TREATED PATIENTS FROM ACROSS THE REGION AND BEYOND. HIS MAIN SOURCE OF NEW PATIENTS IS THROUGH WORD-OF-MOUTH REFERRALS

Diet and oral health – what's the story?

What are we talking about?

How what you eat – and how often you eat – are important factors in maintaining good oral health and preventing cavities. The minute you eat certain foods, bacteria naturally present in the mouth convert sugars in what you've eaten to acids, and it's these acids which start to attack the enamel. The more often you eat and snack, the more frequently you expose your teeth to this acid attack.

What are the best food choices for a healthy mouth?

Cheese, chicken and other meats and nuts are all thought to protect enamel by providing the calcium and phosphorus needed to remineralise teeth – a natural process during which minerals which have been removed from enamel by acids are redeposited in enamel.

What else?

Crunchy vegetables like carrots and fruits like apples are also good, as their high water content dilutes the effects of the sugars they contain and stimulates the flow of saliva, which helps protect against decay by flushing away food particles and neutralising acids. Go steady on acidic foods like oranges and tomatoes, and eat them as part of a larger meal to minimise your teeth's exposure to acid.

And not so good food choices?

The usual suspects – sweets, biscuits and cakes as well as crisps and chips – but also bananas, raisins and other dried fruits. These all contain large amounts of sugar/starch, which bacteria love to feed on.

What about drinks?

The best choices include water, milk, unsweetened tea and sugar-free squashes. Limit your consumption of sugary fizzy drinks and sweetened coffee or tea and also avoid sipping drinks containing sugar throughout the day, as this constantly exposes your teeth to sugar and, in turn, to decay-causing acids.

Are sugar substitutes OK?

Yes. Sugar substitutes (eg isomalt, sorbitol, saccharine, aspartame) may taste like sugar but aren't digested in the same way as sugar, so don't 'feed' mouth bacteria and therefore don't produce decay-causing acids.

“IN THE COURSE OF MY LIFE, I’VE OFTEN HAD TO EAT MY WORDS, AND I MUST CONFESS I’VE ALWAYS FOUND IT A WHOLESOME DIET” – WINSTON CHURCHILL

And what about sugar-free foods?

You need to be careful here, as some sugar-free foods may not have had actual sugar added during processing but that doesn't mean they don't contain other natural sweeteners, like honey, molasses and fructose, which can be just as harmful to teeth. So be sure to check food labels for these 'natural sweeteners': words ending in '-ose' (like sucrose) usually indicate the presence of a natural sweetener.

Is chewing gum OK?

Yes. Chewing sugar-free gum is actually beneficial to your teeth, as chewing helps to dislodge food stuck to teeth and also increases the amount of saliva, which can help neutralise mouth acids.

Any final thoughts?

It's important to eat a variety of foods to maintain overall health. Eat fewer foods containing sugars and starches between meals. If you must snack, opt for foods such as cheese, raw vegetables, nuts and plain yoghurt. And, as ever, be sure to brush your teeth twice a day, preferably with an electric brush, and clean between them once a day, either with floss or interdental brushes. **EL**

**Dr Grant McAree BDS BSc (Hons)
Cosmetic Dentist, The Whyte House
89 Fore Street, Topsham EX3 0HQ
tel: 01392 877494
www.thewhytehouse.com
GDC No 73367**