



# Look, No Cavities!

## *What is the leading, chronic childhood disease?*

**Tooth decay.** Statistics say 50% of 6 to 8 year olds presently have a cavity, and 1 out of every 10 school-aged kids is currently experiencing a toothache or was up the night before with a toothache. The sad thing is dental caries (“tooth decay or cavities”) is not only preventable; it can actually be reversed if caught early.

Caries form due to an imbalance of natural tooth building blocks that are found in the mouth. Calcium, phosphate, saliva and fluoride all work together to keep oral bacteria acids from destroying teeth. Building tooth structure is very much like building a wall: calcium acts as the bricks, phosphate is the mortar, fluoride is the worker who builds and saliva is the material delivery vehicle. If any one of these is lacking, due to poor oral care, careless dietary habits, disease elsewhere in the body, medications that cause dry mouth or the type of bacteria living in the mouth, teeth are at high risk for caries. The acid pulls out the bricks (calcium) and mortar (phosphate) from the protective outer wall of tooth enamel, causing a white, chalky spot on the tooth. If the mineral materials to rebuild the tooth are floating around in the saliva, the white spot will be rebuilt. The body does such a good job with the repair that the white spot will become even harder tooth enamel than it was before, so acid can't successfully attack that spot again. If the building blocks are not available, the white spot becomes softer as the acid moves in deeper to remove more mineral bricks and mortar. Now it is a cavity, or hole, and once it gets to a certain size it must be filled in by your dentist.

How do you make sure these mineral building blocks are available to rebuild teeth? A good diet is a start. There are also many products on the market that contain the minerals the teeth need to rebuild. Look for the label, “Recaldent®” to find gum, toothpaste and mouth rinses that provide tooth

building minerals. Preventing acid attacks means avoiding sugary drinks (soda, energy drinks, sports drinks) and sticky foods like candy and sugary breath mints and gum. Many sugarless products are made with Xylitol, a sweetener that does not cause acid. Ask your dental professional for their product suggestions for remineralizing teeth.

Fluoride in drinking water as well as professionally applied fluoride treatments are very effective in increasing the amount of fluoride in saliva. Dental sealants can be applied to back molar teeth to create a physical, plastic barrier between teeth and acid. Saliva pH test kits are available to check saliva acid levels. Foods like cheese have been found to neutralize mouth acids dramatically. Even sipping water instead of tea, pop and fruit juice can make a big difference in acidity levels.

How acidic are your favorite drinks? If swimming pool acid is at pH 0, and water with no acid is pH 7, here's how they stack up:

|                 |                             |
|-----------------|-----------------------------|
| Coke/Pepsi 2.3  | Sparkling Mineral Water 3.9 |
| Powerade 2.7    | Beer & Wine 4.0             |
| Diet Coke 3.0   | Yogurt 5.1                  |
| Gatorade 3.1    | Milk 6.8                    |
| Fruit Juice 3.5 |                             |

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/001055.htm>

<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/publications/factsheets/prevention/oh.htm>

<http://www.oralhealthamerica.org/>

<http://www.ada.org/public/topics/decay.asp>

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