

Top 5 best and worst holiday foods for your teeth

December 13 2013, by Katie Ciavaglia



Credit: Jim Jurica

Around the holidays, most of us are worried about our pants getting too tight from one too many turkey dinners. But what about our pearly whites?

Holiday foods can take a toll on our teeth and while it's important to brush and floss, choosing the right foods is just as important.

We sought the advice of Dal Dentistry faculty members Chris Lee

(assistant professor, Department of Clinical Sciences) and Heather Doucette (assistant professor, School of Dental Hygiene) to put together a list of some of the top foods to feast on (and to fear) if you're interested in looking after your teeth this holiday season.

Top 5 "Naughty" List

1. Candy canes

Candy canes are a lose-lose holiday treat when it comes to your teeth. If you suck on them, you are getting a longer exposure to sugar that could increase your risk of cavities. If you crunch on them, they get lodged in your teeth and can even cause tooth fractures. Best to just avoid these red and white sticks of sugar if want to avoid an unplanned trip to the dentist in January.

2. Ice cubes

Ice cubes are another double whammy "food" that can be hard on your teeth. The hardness of ice cubes can chip enamel off your teeth and lead to fractures and, in some cases, total breakage of the tooth. Chewing ice is especially bad for those with braces or who have just had dental work done. Pair that with the rapid temperature change, which causes your teeth to contract, and you have the perfect pairing for a late-night trip to the emergency room.

3. Carbonated beverages

If you want your teeth to be as white as the snow falling outside, hold the fizz. Too many carbonated drinks—whether they be diet, light or sugar-free—can wreak havoc in your mouth. The acid from these drinks can dissolve the enamel of your teeth making them sensitive, prone to

cavities and can even start turning them yellow.

4. Egg nog

The high sugar content in egg nog makes it a bad choice for your teeth. If you really need your fix, try making it yourself with no added sugar and little-to-no alcohol. It may not taste the same, but your teeth will thank you later.

5. Chocolate

There's good news and bad news when it comes to chocolate. The bad news is that lighter-coloured chocolate, such as milk chocolate, usually has a lot of sugar. The digestion of this sugar by bacteria in your mouth produces acid which then dissolves the protective layer of tooth enamel and can cause—you guessed it—cavities. The good news is pure dark chocolate is ok: the higher the cocoa content, the better it is for both you and your teeth.

Top 5 "Nice" List

1. Cheese

When that cheese platter gets passed around at your holiday party, go ahead and grab a handful. Cheese is antibacterial and its lower pH levels help make your mouth a less acidic environment. This doesn't mean you should rely on a cheese wheel as your holiday toothbrush, mind you, but know that the extra slice of cheddar is helping your teeth.

2. Nuts

Nuts contain a wide array of nutrients such as magnesium and iron, and

they supply a healthy dose of calcium to help keep your teeth strong. Nuts also stimulate saliva to keep the harmful bacteria away. Now the only decision you'll have to make this [holiday season](#) is...almonds or walnuts?

3. Veggies

Santa forgot to bring you a new toothbrush? No problem. Fibrous vegetables like raw celery and carrots act as nature's toothbrush. Think of them as delicious tiny toothbrushes that remove plaque and contain lots of vitamins and nutrients. It's a win-win situation all around.

4. Turkey

Turkey is non-fermentable and therefore won't stimulate cavity-causing responses in the mouth. This protein-packed holiday staple contains phosphorus, which works with calcium to produce strong teeth. In order to get the full benefits of turkey, be sure to hold the cranberry sauce.

5. Sugar-free gum

Once you're done with your holiday snacking, top it off with a piece of sugar-free gum. Chewing gum increases salivary flow and can help neutralize and wash away the acids that are produced when food is broken down by the bacteria in your mouth. You'll have minty fresh breath and good, strong teeth.

Just remember: everything in moderation. If you are going to indulge in the "bad" foods this [holiday](#), try to do it around meal time. This will lower the length of sugar exposure to the [teeth](#). (This means that, yes, it's better to eat five candy canes in one sitting than five over the course of a day!)

Provided by Dalhousie University

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