

Good oral hygiene is especially important during the holidays

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From Halloween through the new year, holiday parties and family events are filled with gifts and delicious treats. Kids go trick-or-treating, pies are baked and cookies are decorated. It's the time of year that brings

everyone together.

But with all the sugary treats, increased potential for cavities can be a concern. Cavities are small holes in the teeth caused by [tooth decay](#). Eating sugar without proper dental hygiene can lead to plaque buildup on teeth, which can dissolve the enamel on teeth and eventually cause cavities.

It's important to pay attention to holiday favorites like sugary baked goods, candied nuts and candy canes that contain a lot of added sugar which can lead to tooth decay. It's also easy to forget that holiday drinks like apple cider and cocktails can be acidic leading to tooth erosion.

While sweet treats can be enjoyed, as we head into the fall and winter months it is important to stay on top of your oral health to ensure your dental visits are [cavity](#)-free.

Brush your teeth properly. Adults and children alike should brush their teeth twice daily with fluoride toothpaste for a full two minutes. Divide the mouth into four sections, top right, top left, bottom right, bottom left and brush each section for 30 seconds. Gently rotate the toothbrush bristles in circles, being careful not to irritate the gums. Rinse the mouth to wash out all toothpaste.

Floss Daily. Flossing is equally as important as brushing. Flossing cleans hard-to-reach areas between the teeth and below the gum line. One of the most common places for a cavity to form is between the teeth, which is why flossing is necessary when cleaning the entire mouth. Adults and children should floss their teeth at least once a day, ideally at night before bed.

Drink plenty of water. Staying hydrated is beneficial for overall health, but drinking water is also one of the easiest ways to help prevent

cavities. Water containing fluoride strengthens [teeth](#) and prevents decay. Water also washes away leftover food and residue that can lead to cavity-causing bacteria.

Visit the dentist regularly. Adults and children should visit the dentist for routine check-ups every six to 12 months. Visiting the dentist regularly lets people know if they are at risk for cavities. Once a patient is seen, dentists can understand which treatments might be needed or what changes in [oral hygiene](#) or diet might help reduce their risk of tooth decay.

While these tips can help prevent tooth decay, even the most diligent brushers can still get a cavity. There are a few telltale signs that indicate a dental visit is needed. Contact a dentist or [health care provider](#) if you experience any of the following symptoms:

- Toothache or pain
- Sensitivity to heat or cold
- Tooth discoloration
- Swollen gums

Holiday sweets and drinks are something to look forward to and may be hard to avoid completely. Instead of worrying about what isn't okay to eat, focus on consuming in moderation. Drinking plenty of water and keeping up on your brushing and flossing are some of the best ways to take care of oral health.

Provided by University of Kentucky

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