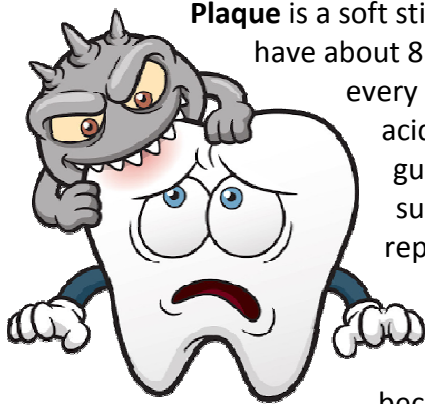




Dental Decay and Oral Care



Plaque is a soft sticky film that attaches to the teeth and contains bacteria. Most of us have about 8 billion bacteria in our mouths. These bacteria double in population every 30 minutes and feed off **sugars and refined carbohydrates** to produce acid and other toxins which lead to decay and the destruction of the gums and bone around the teeth. Acids penetrate below the tooth surface and minerals are lost. Natural recovery or remineralisation can replace some minerals lost and this “**attack and recovery**” process occurs every time we eat. If the “attack” outweighs the “recovery” the damage becomes visible starting out as white spots on the teeth, often along the gum line. These white spots then become holes and become brown or black.

Prevention

Fluoride in the water supply and in toothpaste helps prevent tooth decay, repairs any early decay and helps stop cavities from getting larger.

Saliva is our natural protection against oral acid. However the saliva we produce at mealtimes has 60 times greater ability to protect against decay than saliva produced between meals or when we are asleep. Therefore **the worst time to eat something sweet is between meals**. Anything which reduces salivary flow can lead to increased decay, erosion and gum disease. Chewing sugarless gum for 20 minutes after eating will help to increase saliva flow to neutralise acid. It is important to drink lots of water during the day to prevent dehydration and dry mouth.

Eat a healthy diet. Limit between-meal snacks and make healthy choices such as fruit, cheese and nuts. Avoid acidic drinks such as soft drinks, cola drinks, sports drinks, lemon juice and other fruit juices.

Brush twice a day. Most people brush too hard and too fast. Use a pea-sized amount of toothpaste on a soft toothbrush. Place the toothbrush at a 45 degree angle over your teeth and gums. Use a gentle circular motion over every tooth concentrating on the gum line. Repeat on the inside surfaces. Use a light back and forth motion on the chewing surfaces. You don't need to rinse after brushing as the small amount of fluoridated toothpaste left will continue to protect your teeth so just spit.



If you have exposed your teeth to acid, delay brushing your teeth for 40 minutes to give saliva time to help stabilize the tooth enamel.

Flossing is critical to remove plaque from between your teeth where toothbrushes can't reach and should be done once a day.

Regular visits to your dentist will ensure your teeth and gums are kept in optimal condition by alerting you to signs of early decay and provide advice on how to stop it progressing. Once plaque hardens it becomes calculus (tartar) which cannot be removed by normal brushing. Your dentist has to use special cleaning instruments to remove calculus from tooth surfaces.