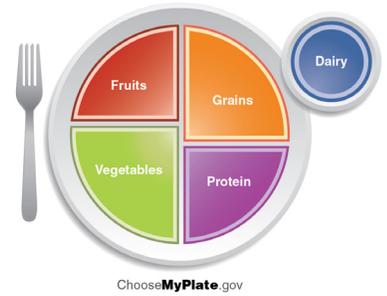


# Oral Health and Nutrition



Your mouth, teeth, and gums are more than just tools for eating. They're essential for chewing and swallowing—the first steps in the digestion process. Your mouth is your body's initial point of contact with the nutrients you consume. So what you put in your mouth impacts not only your general health, but also that of your teeth and gums. In fact, if your nutrition is poor, the first signs often show up in your mouth. Here are a few helpful things to know from the American Dental Association about how what you eat can impact your dental health.

a meal, not by themselves. Dried fruits, including raisins, are also good choices for a healthy diet, but since they are sticky and adhere to teeth, the plaque acids they produce continue to harm teeth long after you stop eating them. Opt for a piece of fresh fruit instead.

## Foods that Benefit Dental Health

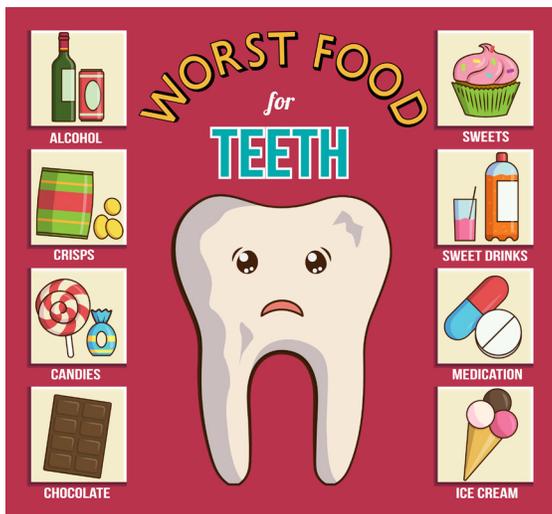
Cheese, milk, plain yogurt, calcium-fortified tofu, leafy greens and almonds are foods that may benefit tooth health thanks to their high amounts of calcium and other nutrients. Protein-rich foods like meat, poultry, fish, milk and eggs are the best sources of phosphorus. Both of these minerals play a critical role in dental health by protecting and rebuilding tooth enamel.

Fruits and vegetables are good choices for a healthy smile since they are high in water and fiber, which balance the sugars they contain and help clean the teeth. These foods also help stimulate saliva production, which washes harmful acids and food particles away from teeth and helps neutralize acid, protecting teeth from decay. Many contain vitamin C (important for healthy gums and quick healing of wounds) and vitamin A (another key nutrient in building tooth enamel).

Hands down, water—particularly fluoridated water—is the most tooth-friendly beverage. Sugary sodas and energy drinks encourage plaque bacteria to attack your enamel, the hard surface of your tooth. Most carbonated soft drinks, including diet soda, are acidic and bad for your teeth. Caffeinated beverages and alcohol can also dry out your mouth. If you do consume drinks other than water, try to drink water as well.

We all want to keep our teeth as long as possible and in the best of condition. Try implementing some of these smart eating habits to improve your overall oral health. Also keep in mind that poor fitting dentures can lead to mouth sores, weight loss and malnutrition. Work with your dentist to keep your denture plate and/or partial fitting well.

**For more information, contact an Aging Partners registered dietitian nutritionists at 402-441-7159.**



## Foods that Harm your Dental Health

Empty calorie foods such as candy (especially hard or sticky candies like lollipops, mints, taffy and caramel); sweets like cookies, cakes and muffins; and snack foods like chips are a cause for dental concern; not only because they offer no nutritional value, but because of the amount and type of sugar they contain that can adhere to teeth. The bacteria in your mouth feed off these sugars, releasing acids, leading to tooth decay and cavities.

Sugar-containing drinks like soda, lemonade, juice and sweetened coffee or tea (iced or hot); are particularly harmful because sipping them causes a constant sugar bath over teeth, which promotes tooth decay.

Nutritious, acidic foods like tomatoes and citrus fruits can have acidic effects on tooth enamel. Eat them as part of