



### EATING HABITS

Americans are consuming foods and drinks high in sugar more often and in larger portions than ever before.

It's clear that "junk" foods and drinks gradually have replaced nutritious beverages and foods for many people.

**The average teenage boy drinks 81 gallons of soft drinks per year.**

**The average teenage girl drinks 61 gallons.**

Alarming, a steady diet of sugary foods and drinks, including sports drinks, can ruin teeth, especially among those who snack throughout the day. Common activities may be contributing to the tendency toward tooth decay. These include "grazing" habitually on foods with minimal nutritional value, and frequently sipping on sugary drinks.

**Do you feel empty-handed without a sweetened soft drink to sip on throughout the day?**

• **Are you in the habit of popping candy into your mouth several times a day?**

• **Do you often skip regular meals and bolster your energy with a few snacks instead?**

**If you answered yes to any of these questions, you are increasing your chances of tooth decay.**

**Sugar mixed with the bacteria in your mouth produces acid. This acid attacks your enamel for up to 20 minutes. When sugar is consumed over and over again, the harmful effect on teeth can be dramatic. And when a tooth decays, the enamel does not grow back. The only option once decay occurs is to see your dentist to have the tooth treated.**

Eating patterns and food choices are important factors that affect tooth decay.

Almost all foods have some type of sugar that cannot and should not be eliminated from our diets. Many of them, such as apples, oranges and milk, contain important nutrients and add enjoyment to eating.

Without a balanced diet, however, health problems including obesity, nutrient deficiencies, and tooth decay can result.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has updated the food pyramid, called My Pyramid. It has a central message of "Steps to a Healthier You." The USDA's

Dietary Guidelines describe a **healthy diet** as one that:

- Emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products;
- Includes lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs, and nuts; and
- Is low in saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, salt (sodium), and added sugars

**One way of making more informed choices is to check the labels of the foods and beverages that you consume.**

### REDUCE YOUR RISK OF TOOTH DECAY

If you consume sugary foods and drinks, do so with meals. Saliva increases during meals and helps neutralize acid production and rinse food particles from the mouth.

- Limit between-meal snacks and sugary beverages. If you crave a snack, choose nutritious foods. If you chew gum, choose sugarless gum. Sugarless gum increases saliva flow and helps wash out food and neutralize decay producing acid.
- Drink water. Consuming optimally fluoridated water can help prevent tooth decay. If you choose bottled water, check the label for the fluoride content.
- Brush your teeth twice daily and floss daily with dental products that have received the ADA Seal of Acceptance.

**See your  
Dentist regularly.**