

# HEALTH TIPS



## Tips for your spine if you sit at a desk

A long day sitting at a desk or working at the computer can cause some aches and pains, even if you are a young person. That's because sitting at a desk makes us vulnerable to developing spine pain and back and neck problems. Poor sitting posture that strains muscles, a lack of stretching or movement, or poor ergonomics, may cause pain. Ergonomics is the applied science of equipment designed to reduce discomfort and fatigue.

Poor posture is the primary cause of neck and back discomfort. To relieve pressure on the spine, it's better to sit in a slightly reclined position than in an upright 90-degree angle. Feet should rest flat on the floor, and hips should be all the way back in the chair.

If you have an adjustable chair, adjust the height so your computer screen is at eye level and so you can use the keyboard and mouse comfortably. Make sure the chin is not jutting forward, because this will cause extra strain to the neck.

For hand and arm comfort, place the keyboard so that your elbows are bent at a 90-degree angle and your keyboard is within comfortable reach. This will help reduce strain on your neck, upper body and wrists. Place the mouse to allow you to keep your arm close to your body and allow you to maintain the bend in your elbow.

- Change your posture often
- Take breaks; get up and move around
- Do stretching and flexibility exercises at your desk to relieve muscle fatigue; to avoid neck strain, for example, slowly look to each side and look down a few times.
- Maintain a good sitting posture but keep your arms and shoulders relaxed



## Snack Smart

### What's wrong with sugary snacks, anyway?

Sugary snacks taste so good-but they aren't so good for your teeth or your body. The candies, cakes, cookies, and other sugary foods that kids love to eat between meals can cause tooth decay. Some sugary foods have a lot of fat in them too.



Kids who consume sugary snacks eat many different kinds of sugar every day, including table sugar (sucrose) and corn sweeteners (fructose). Starchy snacks can also break down into sugars once they're in your mouth.

Did you know that the average American eats about 147 pounds of sugars a year? That's a big pile of sugar! No wonder the average 17-year-old in this country has more than three decayed teeth!

## How do sugars attack your teeth?

Invisible germs called bacteria live in your mouth all the time. Some of these bacteria form a sticky material called plaque on the surface of the teeth. When you put sugar in your mouth, the bacteria in the plaque gobble up the sweet stuff and turn it into acids. These acids are powerful enough to dissolve the hard enamel that covers your teeth. That's how cavities get started. If you don't eat much sugar, the bacteria can't produce as much of the acid that eats away enamel.

## How can I "snack smart" to protect myself from tooth decay?

Before you start munching on a snack, ask yourself what's in the food you've chosen. Is it loaded with sugar? If it is, think again. Another choice would be better for your teeth. And keep in mind that certain kinds of sweets can do more damage than others. Goey or chewy sweets spend more time sticking to the surface of your teeth. Because sticky snacks stay in your mouth longer than foods that you quickly chew and swallow, they give your teeth a longer sugar bath.

You should also think about when and how often you eat snacks. Do you nibble on sugary snacks many times throughout the day, or do you usually just have dessert after dinner? Damaging acids form in your mouth every time you eat a sugary snack. The acids continue to affect your teeth for at least 20 minutes before they are neutralized and can't do any more harm. So, the more times you eat sugary snacks during the day, the more often you feed bacteria the fuel they need to cause tooth decay.

If you eat sweets, it's best to eat them as dessert after a main meal instead of several times a day between meals. Whenever you eat sweets -- in any meal or snack -- brush your teeth well with a fluoride toothpaste afterward.

When you're deciding about snacks, think about:

- the number of times a day you eat sugary snacks
- how long the sugary food stays in your mouth
- the texture of the sugary food (chewy? sticky?)

If you snack after school, before bedtime, or other times during the day, choose something without a lot of sugar or fat. There are lots of tasty, filling snacks that are less harmful to your teeth -- and the rest of your body -- than foods loaded with sugars and low in nutritional value. Snack smart!

Low-fat choices like raw vegetables, fresh fruits, or whole-grain crackers or bread are smart choices. Eating the right foods can help protect you from tooth decay and other diseases. Next time you reach for a snack, pick a non-sugary, low-fat snack food from one of the basic food groups.

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