



Health

Nutrition and Oral Health



In this brochure:

- How the foods you eat affect the health of your teeth and gums
- Which nutrients have special benefits for good oral health
- How to make sure you get enough nutrients in your diet

ADA Healthy Smile Tips

- Brush your teeth twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste.
- Clean between your teeth daily.
- Eat a healthy diet that limits sugary beverages and snacks.
- See your dentist regularly for prevention and treatment of oral disease.

For more information about taking care of your mouth and teeth, visit MouthHealthy.org, the ADA's website just for patients.



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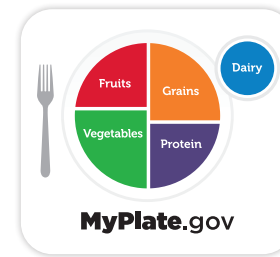
America's leading advocate for oral health

Your body is like a complex machine that needs daily attention if you want it to run well. To fuel your body, you need the right **nutrients**—substances found in food that provide energy. Your diet is made up of all the foods you eat. A diet of fresh fruits, vegetables, and a wide variety of proteins, dairy products and whole grains provides good nutrition to keep your body healthy. The health of your teeth, gums and mouth is directly related to your overall health.

What Is a Balanced Diet?

A balanced diet is one that contains a variety of foods that give your body all the nutrients it needs. To help you understand the foods that supply various nutrients, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) created the resource www.myplate.gov. Getting the right amount of each food group will provide your body with enough protein, carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals, fat and water—the nutrients your body needs.

As shown on the MyPlate image, **fruits** and **vegetables** should make up half of your plate at each meal. It is best to eat a variety of fruits and vegetables. They can be fresh, frozen, canned, dried or cooked. They can be whole, cut-up or mashed. Beans, peas, and lentils (also called legumes) are part of the fruit and vegetable group, and they are also good sources of protein.

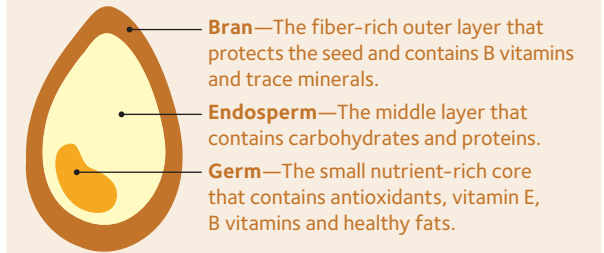


The rest of your meal should be made up of **grains**, **proteins** and **dairy**.

Grains include foods such as:

- Bread
- Pasta
- Breakfast cereals
- Grits
- Tortillas
- Popcorn
- Rice
- Oatmeal

Foods in the grain group are made of refined grains or whole grains. Refined grains, including pasta and white rice, are made using only part of the grain. Whole grain foods are made with the entire grain kernel, including the fiber-containing outer coating and nutrient-packed germ.



A diagram of a whole wheat kernel. Whole grain foods are made with the entire grain kernel and contain fiber and vitamins. Image ©Wheat Foods Council

Half of the grains you eat should be whole grains. Some examples of whole grains are:

- Whole-wheat flour
- Oatmeal
- Brown rice

Studies suggest that eating whole grains can help keep your gums healthy.

Protein gives you energy and helps your body build strong muscles. Make lean protein choices, such as:

- Lean hamburger (labeled as 85% lean/15% fat)
- Skinless poultry
- Fish
- Eggs
- Beans, peas and lentils (legumes)

From the **Dairy** group, choose low-fat or fat-free dairy foods when you can. You have many choices for dairy:

- Low-fat or soy milk (1 cup per serving)
- Plain yogurt (1 cup per serving)
- Cheese (1½ ounces per serving)

To learn more about how to eat the right amounts of each food group, visit www.myplate.gov.

Nutrients That Are Important to Oral Health

Certain nutrients have special benefits for your teeth, gums and overall oral health. When you don't get enough of any of these nutrients, there can be negative effects on your oral health. You can experience tooth erosion or decay, puffy or bleeding gums, or bad breath. Look for the following terms on nutrition labels, or shop for fresh foods that contain these nutrients:

- **Calcium** is important to maintain strong teeth and bones. Green leafy vegetables, canned fish, and dairy products are good sources of calcium.
- **Fiber** from fresh fruits and vegetables stimulates saliva production, which washes harmful acids and food particles away from teeth and helps neutralize cavity-causing acid. Whole grains, nuts and beans are also high in fiber.
- **Fluoride** (FLOOR-eyed) is a natural mineral that protects against tooth decay and cavities. You can get fluoride from toothpastes and mouthrinses, or from your dentist, but one of the easiest sources is fluoridated water. Many communities add fluoride to tap water as a safe way to help their customers get the right amount to strengthen their teeth.
- **Vitamin A** helps build tooth enamel. Good sources of vitamin A include fish, eggs, dairy products, leafy green vegetables, tomatoes and other orange and yellow fruits.
- **Vitamin C** is important for healthy gums and can help reduce bacteria in your mouth. Whole fruits, especially citrus fruits and strawberries, and vegetables, like broccoli, brussels sprouts and kale, are the best source of vitamin C.
- **Vitamin D** helps your body absorb calcium and is important for strong teeth and healthy enamel. It can also reduce inflammation, making your gums healthier. Vitamin D can be found in foods like cereal, fish, mushrooms, and eggs. Spending limited time outside also may give you a boost of vitamin D—sunlight helps to activate vitamin D in your skin.

The nutrition label on packaged foods is designed to tell you about the nutrient content of your food.

| Nutrition Facts | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| 8 servings per container | |
| Serving size | 2/3 cup (55g) |
| Amount per serving | |
| Calories | 230 |
| % Daily Value* | |
| Total Fat 8g | 10% |
| Saturated Fat 1g | 5% |
| Trans Fat 0g | |
| Cholesterol 0mg | 0% |
| Sodium 160mg | 7% |
| Total Carbohydrate 37g | 13% |
| Dietary Fiber 4g | 14% |
| Total Sugars 12g | |
| Includes 10g Added Sugars | 20% |
| Protein 3g | |
| Vitamin D 2mcg | 10% |
| Calcium 260mg | 20% |
| Iron 8mg | 45% |
| Potassium 240mg | 6% |

(For educational purposes only. These labels do not meet the labeling requirements described in 21 CFR 101.9.)

Image credit: U.S. Food and Drug Administration

- Choose foods that are **lower** in % Daily Value (DV) for Saturated Fat, Sodium, and Added Sugars.
- Choose foods that are **higher** in % DV for Dietary Fiber, Vitamin D, Calcium, Iron, and Potassium.

Whole Foods Versus Processed Foods

You probably have heard the terms “whole foods” and “processed foods.” Experts recommend that you eat whole foods and avoid processed foods. But what is the difference between them?

Whole foods are foods that have not been cooked, combined with other ingredients, or otherwise altered. Whole foods include fresh fruits and vegetables (such as apples and green beans), whole grains (such as oats, brown rice and barley), nuts, beans, fish, shellfish and eggs.

Processed foods have been altered from their original forms during preparation. This includes cooking, freezing, canning, or drying. Some foods need to be processed to make them safe or practical to eat. But when food is processed, additives and preservatives, like sugar and salt, are usually added and important nutrients, such as fiber, are removed.

- **Minimally processed foods** are foods that have been processed only a little, such as whole wheat flour or canned and frozen vegetables.
- **Ultra-processed foods** typically contain more than five ingredients, including additives and preservatives, like added fat, salt, sugar, and artificial colors and flavorings. Ultra-processed foods do not contain many nutrients, and eating them leaves less room in your diet for more nutritious whole foods.

Examples of ultra-processed foods include baking mixes, many microwavable meals, sweetened breakfast cereals, fruit-flavored yogurt, and packaged snacks like chips and cookies. Beverages—like soda, artificially sweetened fruit drinks, sports drinks, energy drinks, sweetened waters, and prepackaged coffee and tea beverages—also can be ultra-processed.

It is best to eat mostly whole or minimally processed foods when possible because they contain the nutrients your body needs to stay healthy. Look at the list of ingredients on the food you buy, and also shop for fresh, whole foods.

Added Sugar

Foods that contain sugars and starches of any kind can contribute to tooth decay. That's because the bacteria that live on your teeth—called **plaque** (pronounced PLACK)—feed on the sugar in the beverages you drink and the food you eat and make acid that can cause cavities. The American Dental Association (ADA) recommends you limit sugary beverages and snacks in your diet.

One way to help control the amount of sugar you consume is to read food labels and choose foods and beverages that are low in added sugars. Added sugars are found in foods such as regular soda, candy, cookies and pastries.

What About Snacks?

Having starchy or sugary foods and drinks many times a day allows bacteria to make acid throughout the day. This raises your risk of getting cavities. Here are some tips to help you avoid tooth decay:

- **Limit snacks between meals.** Choose foods that are low in acid and sugar, like an apple or a handful of almonds. Follow up with a glass of water. This can help rinse bits of food from your mouth, but it does not replace brushing and flossing.
- **Avoid sugary drinks.** Many sports drinks, energy drinks, sodas and sweetened teas have a lot of acid and sugar. Even fruit juices that are “100% juice” can be acidic and high in sugar.
- **If you have sugary foods and drinks, have them with meals.** Saliva increases during meals, which helps weaken acid and rinse bits of food from your mouth.
- **Chew sugarless gum** that has the ADA Seal of Acceptance. Chewing gum after meals increases saliva and can help reduce cavities.
- **Drink water.** Drinking tap water with fluoride can help prevent cavities.

