



## Optimal Dental Health

Few indicators of overall vibrant health surpass that of a mouth full of healthy teeth. So both parents and doctors alike do well to pay careful attention to the dental health of children. What can parents do to enhance their children's dental health? What should be avoided? The answers may surprise you!

### What to Pursue

1. In recent years, it has become clear that a [low salivary pH](#) can lead to cavities. Thus, if your child has recently been diagnosed with dental caries, it would be wise to have her saliva pH tested. If the pH is low (6 or less; in the acidic range), then increasing her intake of [alkaline foods](#) like leafy greens, cucumbers, and celery would be a good idea.

Prepare a home-made mouthwash consisting of a teaspoon of baking soda and a few drops of an appealing essential oil such as lemon or tangerine in a pint or so of water. This is safer, more affordable, and more alkalinizing than a Listerine-type rinse.

Finally, [certain probiotics](#) and fermented foods may also help keep saliva from becoming acidic and damaging teeth.

2. We tend to forget this, but teeth are actually bones, and the latest research is showing how important really [minerals](#). But it was [Weston Price](#), an astute dentist who travelled the world a hundred years ago, that first observed the effects of processed (mineral-depleted) foods on children's oral health.

Among these minerals, one of the most important is [magnesium](#). Just as iron sits in the center of our hemoglobin molecules, so magnesium occupies the center of chlorophyll. Thus leafy greens like spinach, parsley, and romaine are great sources. Raw cacao, the basic ingredient in chocolate, is the highest known food source.

Another key mineral is silica. Silica is found in many tooth pastes in the form of diatomaceous earth. This is what gives them an abrasive quality. In the short term, this may be useful to remove plaque. But long term use might take a toll on enamel. A better way to get silica into your child is through food sources such as fruits / vegetable peels and skins or herbs such as nettle and horsetail.

Finally, trace minerals such as boron, strontium, and vanadium help build strong bones and teeth. Children consuming a mineral-rich diet tend to have straighter, more widely-spaced teeth. Why do so many junior high students these days find themselves in a palate-expander? Mineral deficiency! If your child has consumed processed foods, a good way to restore mineral balance is adding sea vegetables such as dulse and kelp to their diet.

3. A third key to keeping your children's teeth healthy is certain **vitamins**. Why do children living in New York have more cavities than those living in Florida? They have less sun exposure, and hence make less **vitamin D**. More cavities are diagnosed in winter than summer. A breast-fed toddler that starts to develop caries may have a vitamin-D deficient mother.

Another vitamin that has been shown to reduce chances of osteoporosis is vitamin K2. The best source known is butter from grass-fed cows. Again, it was [Dr. Weston Price](#) who made this discovery.

4. Finally, there are some **hygienic measures** to consider. Brushing teeth after your child consumes anything sticky like dried fruit or candy is important: firm enough to clear residue but gentle enough to avoid gum recession. Gum recession tends to start on the left teeth in a right-handed child because that's where they tend to focus their strongest strokes.

Flossing and perhaps tongue scraping are also a good habit to develop at an early age. This may be a challenge in a child with sensory issues or when both parents are working full-time.

### **What to Avoid**

Some of us grew up on Pepsi, Kool-aid, and Tootsie Roll Pops. We then paid the price in the dental chair. There's no need for our kids to go through that.

Feeding your toddler milk, juice, or any sweet liquid from a bottle after 15 months of age can quickly take a toll on the upper central teeth. No child should have to experience bottle caries.

Fluoride has been a contentious topic for decades. In fact, the first study in the US pitted children raised in Newburgh, where the water has been fluoridated since 1945, against children in Kingston. Both groups experienced an equal drop in cavities but the conclusion drawn was that fluoride works. More recently, exposure to fluoride has been linked not only to thyroid, kidney, and bone disorders but even to effects on the brain.

### **Final Comments**

Read the label on your child's tooth paste. Does it contain fluoride, SLS (a detergent), calcium carbonate (chalk), or artificial sweeteners? If so, consider a healthier alternative. Perhaps a product sweetened with xylitol and flavored with essential oils.

When was the last time you heard about a cow going to the dentist? Indeed, animals that chew grass, leaves, and such just do not experience tooth decay. We can learn a lesson from that. Green smoothies, green juices, and fresh salads can help your children achieve optimal dental health.