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### 6 Dietary Tips for Healthier Teeth

1. Limit between-meal snacking. Fewer snacks mean less acid exposure for your teeth. If you snack, choose foods that are not fermentable carbohydrates.
  - **Best choices** — Cheese, chicken or other meats, or nuts. These foods actually may help protect tooth enamel. They do this by neutralizing acids or by providing the calcium and phosphorus needed to put minerals back in the teeth.
  - **Moderate choices** — Firm fruits such as apples and pears and vegetables. Firm fruits contain natural sugars. However, their high water content dilutes the effects of the sugars. These fruits also stimulate the flow of saliva, which fights bacteria and helps protect against decay. Vegetables do not contain enough carbohydrates to be dangerous.
  - **Worst choices** — Candy, cookies, cakes, crackers, breads, muffins, potato chips, french fries, pretzels, bananas, raisins and other dried fruits. These foods provide a source of sugar that certain bacteria can use to produce acid. The problem can be worse if the foods stick to teeth or get caught between them.
2. Limit the amount of soft drinks or any other drinks that contain sugar. These include coffee or tea with added sugar, cocoa and lemonade. Fruit juices contain natural sugars that also can cause decay. Limit the amount of time you take to drink any of these drinks. Avoid sipping them throughout the day. A can of soda that you finish with a meal exposes your teeth to acids for a shorter time than a soda that takes you two hours to drink.
  - **Better choices** — Unsweetened tea and water, especially fluoridated water. Tea also has fluoride, which can strengthen tooth enamel. Water helps flush away bits of food. It also can dilute the sugar acids.
3. Avoid sucking on hard candies or mints, even the tiny ones. They have enough sugar to increase the acid produced by bacteria to decay levels. If you need a mint, use the sugarless varieties.
4. Very acidic foods (such as citrus fruits) can make the mouth more acidic. This may contribute to a loss of minerals in the teeth. The effects of acid exposure add up over time. Every little bit counts.
5. Brush your teeth after eating and after drinking sugary drinks, to remove the plaque bacteria that create the destructive acids. If you cannot brush after every meal, brush at least twice a day.
6. Chew sugarless gum that contains xylitol. This can help reduce the risk of cavities. The gum helps dislodge some of the food stuck to your teeth. It also increases saliva flow to help neutralize the acids.