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Fluoride helps prevent tooth decay (1974)

American Dental Association

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Fluoride Helps
Prevent Tooth
Decay

Fluoride in the Water

Some communities have always had lower rates of tooth decay than others. Until the 1930's, we didn't know why. Today, we realize that tooth decay is greatly minimized in certain areas because of fluoride, a substance which occurs naturally in varying amounts in nearly all foods and water supplies.

Fluoride can make your teeth more resistant to decay by being absorbed into tooth enamel. People who drink water with adequate fluoride from birth onward can have up to 65% fewer cavities than they would otherwise experience. If your water supply is fluoride deficient, small amounts can be added to give you an optimum level of protection. This is fluoridation.

Among fluoridation's supporters are the American Dental Association, the American Medical Association, the World Health Organization and many other organizations in the fields of science and public affairs including the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Several states require fluoridation as a public health measure where water supplies are fluoride deficient.

Applying Fluoride to the Teeth

Studies have shown that a fluoride solution applied directly to the teeth also helps reduce tooth decay.

Before fluoride is professionally applied, the teeth are cleaned by a dentist or a dental hygienist. Then a fluoride solution is painted on the teeth, or a specially fitted tray (or mouthpiece) is filled with a fluoride gel and placed over the teeth for a few minutes. The fluoride unites with the enamel, making the tooth more resistant to decay.

You can also use fluoride topically at home. Both fluoride toothpastes and fluoridated mouth rinses can help reduce cavities. Some products have been accepted as effective for decay prevention by the Council on Dental Therapeutics of the American Dental Association. Look for their statement of acceptance on the carton.

The degree to which applied fluoride is effective varies from child to child partly due to his heredity, but mainly due to diet and his oral hygiene practices. Some studies have indicated benefits to adults from the topical application of fluorides. Again, the effectiveness varies from one person to another because of habits.

Although topical application alone can provide some protection to teeth which have already erupted in the mouth, water fluoridation is the most inexpensive, effective and universally available preventive measure.

When a community undertakes fluoridation, topical fluoride treatments should still be continued for those children whose teeth were substantially formed or erupted in the mouth at the time of fluoridation. Although benefits may be only marginal when topical fluoride is used with children born and raised in a community with fluoridated water, the treatments can be helpful for children who have frequent dental decay.

Fluoride Supplements

Where drinking water does not contain enough fluoride, supplemental chewable tablets can be beneficial *if* they are taken every day throughout the entire time teeth are being formed (at least until age 12-14). By this time, the crowns of all permanent teeth (except the third molars) have developed and are present in the mouth. Third molars generally appear by about age 20 and thus, fluoride treatment should be extended to this age. A dentist or physician must supervise people who take fluoride tablets to assure that proper concentrations are taken.

No fluoride, whether applied topically in the form of a solution, gel, mouth rinse or dentifrice, or taken as a dietary supplement in the form of a chewable tablet, can substitute for adequate fluoride in the community water supply. Water fluoridation provides benefits to all regardless of

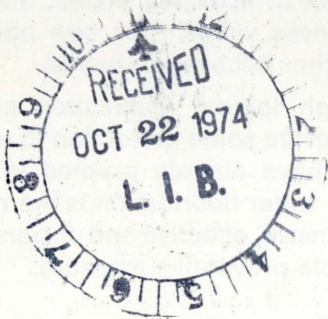
economic status, health knowledge, motivation or ability to follow an exacting regimen for a long period of time.

But even fluoridation of public water supplies and other means of using fluorides will not prevent all tooth decay. Although clearly helpful, they are only partial preventives. You must help yourself. Brush and floss your teeth daily (to remove harmful plaque). Eat a balanced diet with limited sweets. Use fluorides. By helping yourself you can protect and keep your teeth all your life.



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