

Patient information about dental decay, caries.

Caries explained

Dental decay, caries, is a very common disease amongst people of all ages.

Usually dental caries is developing slowly and in the early stages it can usually be stopped by improving the oral hygiene. If caries is not stopped in time it can cause pain and break down of the teeth.

Caries can occur when the teeth are exposed to both sugar and bacteria. We all have bacteria in the oral cavity but if the bacteria are removed regularly, they will not mature enough to produce the tooth destructive acid. This is the main reason we all need to brush our teeth twice daily. The more sugar we eat the more nutrients we provide for the oral bacteria to use for acid production. Restricting sugar intake is therefore another important factor to reduce the risk of dental caries.



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The first signs of caries can appear as white, chalky spots on the teeth. At this point the caries lesions can be arrested by thorough removal of the bacteria and chemically by influx of fluoride to strengthen the tooth mineral structure. If the lesion progresses eventually it will reach the deeper part of the tooth. Sooner or later the surface will break down and a proper hole appear on the tooth. If the caries lesion continues to develop it will reach the nerve inside the tooth and can cause the nerve to become infected and die. In that case the tooth will need a root canal treatment.

Caries is preventable

Caries is prevented and controlled by daily brushing and thoroughly cleaning the teeth and by using fluoridated tooth paste. It is recommended to spit out after brushing but not to rinse with water or mouthwash immediately after. This allows for the fluoride to stay in the mouth for longer. The fluoride strengthens the tooth mineral structure, and makes the tooth more resistant to bacterial acid.

As the bacteria need sugar to produce the destructive acid one can reduce the risk of caries by reducing the frequency of sugar intake from drinks and food.

The dentist can detect early stages of caries by a clinical and radiological examination and regular check ups can allow for early stages of caries to be detected. The dentist and dental hygienist can give advice and instruction with regards to good brushing habits and techniques and can apply high concentration fluoride varnish to prevent early caries lesions from progressing. Fluoridated mouth washes can be used between brushing for a more frequent exposure of fluoride. If needed it is also possible to get a prescription for a high concentration fluoride tooth paste.

How caries is treated

If the caries lesion progresses to the deeper parts of the tooth the tooth will need a filling. The decayed tooth tissue is then removed with a bur and a filling or crown is placed to replace the missing tooth substance.



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