

# Fact Sheet

## TOOTH DECAY



### What is tooth decay and how does it happen?

Tooth decay is another way of describing bad teeth. Huge numbers of people all over the world suffer from tooth decay, but it is totally preventable, simply by brushing your teeth properly and watching what you eat and drink throughout the day.

For tooth decay to happen you need 2 things.....**plaque** and **sugar**.

Plaque is the name of the bacteria or germs which constantly grow on your teeth and gums. 20 minutes after brushing your teeth, plaque starts to grow again which is why we have to brush frequently, at least twice a day.

If you give the plaque some sugar, either from snacks like biscuits or a drink of juice, the plaque changes the sugar to an acid which can start to remove some of the calcium salts from your teeth. It can take up to one hour for the saliva in your mouth to flush away the acid and it's during this time that the damage is done. At the same time as the saliva helps to flush away the acid, calcium salts are replaced back into your teeth helping to repair the damage. However, if you frequently have sugar throughout the day you will have acid on your teeth for long periods and this is when a cavity (hole) will start to form.

### THE TIPS ARE...

- Brush your teeth and gums regularly to remove the plaque.
- Keep sugary snacks and drinks to mealtimes. (At mealtimes we have lots of saliva in our mouth to help to digest our food, remember saliva flushes away the acid).
- Between meals choose healthier snacks and drinks like fresh fruit, raw vegetables, breadsticks, plain milk and water.
- Chew sugar-free gum after meals as it helps to produce saliva.
- Visit your Dentist every six months for a check-up.

**Tooth Decay**



**Healthy Teeth**

