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For Better Living  
Dietary Habits Important for Dental Health

When it comes to preventing tooth decay, how often you eat can be just as important as what you eat. Tooth decay has long been linked to eating sugary foods; however, sugary foods are just part of the equation. Whether or not you develop cavities depends on many things including the foods you eat, how often you eat, whether or not you get regular dental checkups, the genetic makeup of your teeth and how much saliva your body naturally produces.

Everything we eat passes through our mouth. And when we eat foods that contain carbohydrates, changes occur in our mouths that can lead to cavities. Bacteria contained in the plaque that constantly forms on our teeth mixes with carbohydrates to make acids capable of damaging tooth enamel. Over time, exposure to these acids may cause tooth enamel to break down, resulting in cavities.

Here are some dietary habits and guidelines you can follow to help minimize the amount of acid created by the bacteria on your teeth and therefore, help prevent tooth decay.

- \* Eat a healthy diet based on variety, balance and moderation. An adequate supply of vitamins, minerals and other nutrients is essential for healthy teeth and gums.

- \* Limit between-meal snacking to help reduce the time your teeth are exposed to acid. Bacteria in plaque produce potentially harmful acids for 20 to 40 minutes after each exposure to carbohydrates.

- \* Limit the amount of soft drinks, fruit-flavored drinks and other sugar-containing beverages, including coffee and tea with added sugar. Also, limit the amount of time taken to drink these beverages. If you choose to drink a can of soda, it's better to do so with a meal rather than sip on it over two hours because your teeth will be exposed to acid for a shorter period of time.

- \* Drink fluoridated water if you can. Water helps rinse the teeth, and fluoride helps protect against dental decay.

- \* Avoid sucking on hard candies, mints, cough drops or lollipops. These foods have enough sugar in them to increase the acid produced by the bacteria in your mouth to decay-causing levels. If you have a mint, choose the sugar-free varieties.

- \* Avoid giving infants a bottle of juice, formula or milk to pacify them. "Baby-bottle" tooth decay occurs among young children when their teeth and gums are exposed to carbohydrate-containing beverages for extended periods of time. This happens most commonly when babies fall asleep sucking on a bottle. If you choose to use a bottle as a pacifier, fill it with plain water.

- \* Whenever possible, brush your teeth after eating to remove the plaque-containing bacteria that create the harmful acids. If you cannot brush after every meal, brush your teeth at least twice a day using a fluoridated toothpaste that has the American Dental Association Seal of Acceptance.

- \* Be sure to have regular dental checkups that include a complete oral exam and thorough cleaning.

Source: Colorado Cooperative Extension

### Summer Squash Casserole

6 small yellow squash, cut into chunks  
2 eggs, beaten  
½ cup plus 2 tablespoons dry bread crumbs, divided  
2 tablespoons sugar  
1 ½ teaspoons dried minced onion  
½ teaspoon salt  
1/8 teaspoon pepper  
2 teaspoons butter, melted

Place squash in a large saucepan and cover with water. Bring to a boil. Boil, uncovered, for 15-20 minutes or until tender. Drain well. In a bowl, combine squash, eggs, ½ cup bread crumbs, sugar, onion, salt and pepper until blended.

Transfer to a 1 ½ qt. baking dish, coated with non-stick spray. Bake, uncovered, at 350 degrees for 20 minutes. Toss the remaining bread crumbs with butter. Sprinkle over the top of casserole. Bake at 30 minutes or until golden brown. Yield: 8 servings