

How does tooth decay develop? - Smile Solutions

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How does tooth decay develop? Tooth decay is a dental disease process in which oral bacteria produce acids that remove minerals from the tooth. It may also be known as cavities, holes or caries. For dental decay to occur, the decay-causing bacteria need to be in contact with the teeth and have a source of food. Bacteria are able to attach to teeth by creating plaque on the tooth surface. With time, increased numbers of acid-producing bacteria appear. These produce acid after consumption of sugars and other fermentable carbohydrates. At first, the acids dissolve the minerals on the outer surface of the tooth, causing the normally shiny enamel to appear dull. With more time, the decay can progress from the enamel layer into the middle layer of the tooth, known as dentine. At this point, the tooth may show symptoms of pain or sensitivity. If the decay continues, it will reach the inner layer of the tooth, known as the dental pulp. Once in the pulp, the infection usually causes severe pain, sensitivity and possible swelling in the gums around the tooth.

How to prevent dental decay Regular oral hygiene involving daily brushing and cleaning between the teeth such as with floss helps remove plaque. Additionally, fluoride reduces bacterial activity and prevents loss of minerals from the tooth. The frequency of sugar intake can also be minimised to reduce the supply of nutrients to bacteria. Dairy products such as milk and cheese also protect against tooth decay, as they contain beneficial components such as casein, calcium and phosphorus. Other dental measures include sealing deep grooves (or fissures) in the teeth, and using remineralising products such as high-strength fluoride and casein–calcium phosphate formulations.

How is dental decay treated? In the early stages of dental decay, when a cavity or hole has not yet occurred on the enamel, replenishing lost minerals with remineralising products as mentioned above may reverse the decay. To be successful, this usually requires a sustained improvement in oral hygiene and diet. If decay has caused a cavity but not yet reached the pulp, a filling material may be placed after removal of the diseased portions of the tooth. The tooth filling material may be tooth coloured or metallic. If decay has reached the pulp, an attempt to save the tooth may be made with root canal therapy. If the tooth is badly broken down, it may need to be extracted (removed). Further information It is also important to recognise that tooth decay may occur in conjunction with other dental diseases and that a comprehensive examination is essential to recognise other problems before treatment. For further information, please call Smile Solutions on 13 13 96 . Articles from Smile Solutions View Blogs Specialist Care Smile Solutions 18 Aug 2026 Endodontist vs Dentist for Root Canal: Why It Makes a Difference Read More General Smile Solutions

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