



The Truth About Candy

Many of us remember growing up being told that candy was the mortal enemy to our teeth. It was something to be avoided if we didn't want a mouthful of cavities. The truth is, however, that candy may be no worse at causing cavities than many of the other foods we enjoy.

We've all heard that candy is bad for our teeth. Parents often provide their children with fruits, health snacks, and other substitutes for candy. Surprisingly, these snacks can be just as bad or worse than the candy they replace.

Cavities are caused by bacteria which work, live, and play within our mouths. These bacteria feast on food left on teeth after meals. The bacteria produce acid as a by-product of their feasting. It is this acid which eats into tooth enamel creating cavities. Surprisingly, bacteria can use other foods just as efficiently as they can use candy to create this cavity causing acid. In fact, any food containing carbohydrates can be utilized by bacteria. This includes foods such as potato chips, crackers, and breads as well as fruits, peanut butter, and pasta.

In fact, many of the snacks which we think are healthy can actually be very damaging to teeth. These include foods which tend to get stuck to teeth where they provide a constant source of carbohydrates for bacteria to use in creating acid. Raisins, for example, tend to get stuck on teeth providing a long term feast for bacteria. Likewise, peanut butter also tends to get stuck on teeth long after we eat also providing a source of carbohydrates for bacteria to feed on.

So if candy is no worse or better at causing cavities than other foods, why the bad rap when it comes to candy? One reason may be that although candy provides the body with sugar (an energy source), candy does not provide the body with other nutrients vital to the proper growth of young bodies. By constantly eating candy, young children may not be getting enough of the foods that provide them with needed proteins, fats, vitamins, and minerals.

If you chose to let your children have candy, what are some of the things that you can do to ensure that your kids enjoy candy without getting a mouthful of cavities?

The key is moderation and balance. Just as any substance eaten in excess can lead to problems, so can eating too much candy. Make sure your children are in the habit of brushing their teeth after eating candy. This toothbrushing is also necessary after they eat other between-meal snacks. Another excellent way to reduce your children's craving for candy is to provide other foods as snacks, like fruits, nuts, and yogurt. Remember, however, that kids need to brush after eating these snacks as well in order to prevent cavities. With a little education, a little moderation, and proper brushing after eating, your children can enjoy candy without ruining their teeth.