

Fact Sheet



Tooth Decay (Cavities)

Tooth decay can happen to anyone who has their own natural teeth in their mouths—no matter what age!

Tooth decay is caused by bacteria that normally live in the mouth. These bacteria cling to teeth and form a sticky, colourless film called dental plaque. The bacteria in plaque live on sugars and produce decay-causing acids that dissolve minerals on tooth surfaces. Tooth decay can also develop on the exposed roots of the teeth if you have gum disease or receding gums (Receding gums are gums that are pulling away from the teeth so that you can see the roots).

Just as with children, fluoride is also important for adult teeth. Adding fluoride to the water can reduce tooth decay for all ages. Fluoride can also be added to mouth rinses and some toothpastes so it is wise to read labels carefully and buy mouthwashes and toothpastes that have added fluoride.

Periodontal (Gum) Disease

A common cause of tooth loss after age 35 is periodontal disease. These are infections of the gum and bone that hold the teeth in place. Gum diseases are also caused by dental plaque. The bacteria in plaque causes gums to become inflamed and bleed easily. If left untreated, the disease gets worse as pockets of infection form between the teeth and gums. This causes receding gums and loss of supporting bone. You may lose enough bone to cause your teeth to become loose and fall out.

You can prevent gum disease by removing plaque. Thoroughly brush and floss your teeth each day. Carefully check your mouth for early signs of disease such as red, swollen or bleeding gums. See a dentist regularly—every 6 to 12 months or immediately you see any signs of gum disease!

Tartar

If plaque stays on the teeth for a while it forms a hard layer called tarter. Tartar has to be scraped off teeth by a dentist. Tartar build-up increases the risk of dental cavities.