

# WHAT IS TOOTH DECAY?

Tooth decay happens when acids wear away the tooth's hard surface layer, called **enamel**. These acids are made by a sticky film called **plaque**. Plaque has germs that feed on sugary foods. The process of digesting these sugars makes acids that attack tooth surfaces.

Over time, tooth decay can cause holes in the tooth surface. These are called **cavities**. If left untreated, cavities can get bigger. They can even destroy the tooth.

If you think you have a cavity, see your dental team. Your dentist is likely to put in a **filling**. Fillings may stop the cavity from getting bigger.

Acids constantly attack your tooth surfaces, but tooth decay doesn't happen all at once. That's because other elements in your mouth work to strengthen your teeth and stop the tooth decay process. One of these elements is **saliva**. Saliva has minerals that help strengthen tooth surfaces. **Fluoride**, a natural mineral that is often added to water and found in toothpaste, also helps to make teeth stronger.

### Cavities

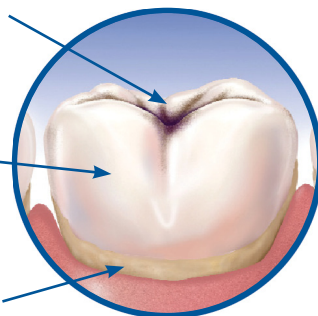
Holes in the enamel. Cavities can develop on biting surfaces and between teeth.

### Enamel

The hard surface layer of the tooth.

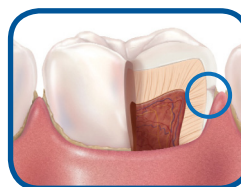
### Plaque

Sticky coating that collects on teeth. Plaque makes acids that can lead to tooth decay.



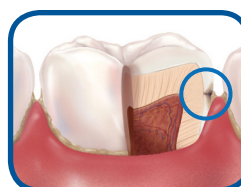
## Dentists check for tooth decay and cavities

### 4 stages of tooth decay



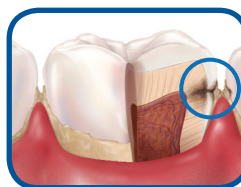
#### Stage 1

The dull spot on the tooth's surface may be decay. Brushing with a fluoride toothpaste and flossing may prevent it from becoming a cavity.



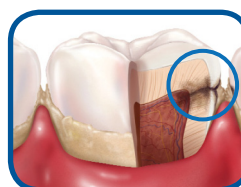
#### Stage 2

The decay is now a cavity. It has gone through the tooth's hard surface layer.



#### Stage 3

Now that the cavity has reached the softer layer of the tooth, it will get bigger faster.



#### Stage 4

If the cavity is not filled, it can cause bigger problems deeper in the tooth. This is why it's important to see your dental team regularly.

If you do have tooth decay, your dental team may talk to you about fillings, fluoride, or other treatment choices.

## WHAT IS TOOTH DECAY?

**Here are some tips to help prevent tooth decay:**

**Don't eat a lot of sugary foods.  
Cut down on snacks between meals.**

- This will help prevent plaque from making acid. It will also reduce the number of times your teeth are exposed to acids.

**Eat a diet high in calcium.**

- Calcium helps strengthen tooth surfaces.

**Drink plenty of water, especially if you take certain medicines.**

- Some medicines can decrease the amount of saliva your body makes. This may put you at greater risk for tooth decay.

**Use a toothpaste and mouthwash with fluoride.**

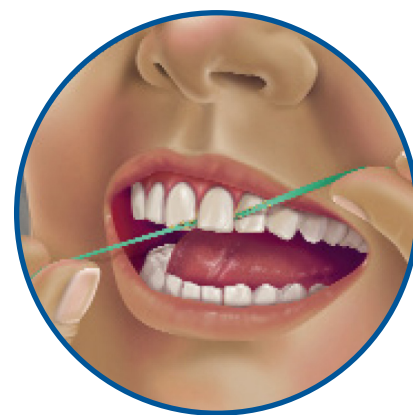
- Fluoride helps make tooth surfaces harder and stronger.

**Visit your dental team at least twice a year.**

- They will clean your teeth and check for cavities.

**Quick facts about tooth decay**

- Tooth decay happens when acids wear away the tooth's hard surface layer.
- Tooth decay can cause holes in your teeth. These are called cavities.
- Tooth decay can be avoided by brushing twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste and flossing between teeth.
- Toothpastes and mouthwash with fluoride can also help strengthen teeth and help fight tooth decay.



**For more tips on how to prevent tooth decay, talk to your dental team or visit [oralb.com](http://oralb.com).**